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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Problems Faced by Adolescents, Mothers, and Stepfathers While Learning to Live in a Remarried Family

BY

Lynda J. Phillips ©

A THESIS

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(Signed) Lynda Phillips

PERMANENT ADDRESS:

9217 - 101 A Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 0C2

DATED April 18/93

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Problems Faced by Adolescents, Mothers, and Stepfathers While Learning to Live in a Remarried Family submitted by Lynda J. Phillips in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY.

Peter Calder, Ph.D.
Supervisor

Gerald Kysela, Ph.D.

Linda MacDonald, Ph.D.

Dustin Shannon-Brady, Ph.D.

Reinhild Boehm, Ph.D.

Marilyn Assheton-Smith, Ph.D.

Date April 18, 1993

Oscar Christensen, Ph.D.

DEDICATED TO

CONOR AND MATTHEW HEENEY

Abstract

The goals of the present research were to identify the problems experienced by mothers, stepfathers, adolescent males, and adolescent females as they learned to live in their "new" remarried families and to determine the themes underlying the problems. Members from twenty remarried families, living in Edmonton, participated in the research.

The problems reported in each of the four groups were displayed on four master lists. Twenty five family therapists then sorted the problems into themes. The results of the 25 theme sorts were then analyzed using Trochim's (1989) Concept Mapping program to yield the higher order themes derived from the therapists' theme sorts.

The findings of this research indicated that mothers, stepfathers, adolescent boys, and adolescent girls, living in Edmonton, all experienced problems. Each group identified different kinds of problems which reflected different conceptual themes. The females problems tended to be more personal and emotion-based than the males whose were more cognitive and practical. The mothers' themes included relationships, belonging and fitting in, sexuality, children's behaviour, time management, and household management. The fathers' themes were role definition, divided loyalties, scheduling, lamentations, and couple relations re: practical matters. The boys' themes included stepfather relations, loyalties, and stepsibling relations. The girls' themes were rivalry, boundaries, alienation, and stepfamily identity.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Nearly half of all North American marriages now end in divorce (Norton & Moorman, 1987). The majority of divorced men and women remarry and most remarriages contain stepchildren who live either full or part time in the remarried family (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). The prevalence of remarried families as a current family form is a consequence of the increase in divorce in the last two decades and reflects "monumental changes that have no historical precedent" (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1987). Remarried families have, since the mid 1980's, become a dominant family form (Glick, 1989). Since 90% of children reside with their mothers following a divorce, the stepfather family is the most prevalent remarried family form (Glick, 1989).

Glick's (1984) projections on the familial living arrangements of children suggest that for children born in the late 1970's and early 1980's, at least 50% will spend time in a one-parent family. Then, due to a subsequent remarriage, the majority of these children will spend time in a two-parent family which includes a stepparent.

In the United States, approximately 50% of couples who remarry will divorce again (Clingempeel & Brand, 1985). This means that about half of the children whose parents remarry will experience a second parental divorce. Remarried couples tend to end their

second marriages much sooner than first time married couples. The divorce rate among remarried couples is 50% higher than it is for first married couples during the first five years of remarriage and drops afterwards (Glick, 1983). The first two to five years of remarriage are considered to be the critical years for adjustment (Visher & Visher, 1990).

The process of remarriage is considered to be one of the most difficult developmental transitions for families to negotiate (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). Some families are able to reorganize without debilitating stress. However some experience difficulties and unexpected problems. Some remarried families reach out for counselling and tend to do so during the first year of remarriage, and again when children reach adolescence (Wald, 1981).

Adjustment to remarried family life, for both adults and children, appears to be the most difficult for families with adolescents (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Visher & Visher, 1987). The clinical literature (e.g., McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Sager, Walker, Brown, Crohn, Rodstein, 1981; Visher & Visher, 1990; Wald, 1981) reports that problems and conflicts can arise when a remarried family is attempting to establish or redefine bonds, cohesiveness and a sense of collective identity while adolescents are concerned with individuation, emerging sexuality and independence.

Among the cited problems experienced by some adolescents are: guilt associated with sexual attraction to stepparents or stepsiblings (Visher & Visher, 1990), feelings,

such as anger or hurt, of being displaced by the new stepparent (Kompara, 1980), depression, fears of another abandonment or loss, and concern about the unknown aspects of the future (Sager et. al., 1981).

McGoldrick and Carter's (1988) discussion of the many problems encountered by parents included conflict in step relations, discipline issues, solidifying the couple relationship in view of the stresses in reorganizing with children, and the establishment of supra-family relationships and permeable boundaries amongst separate households.

Although little research has investigated sex differences, some of the clinical literature suggests that male and female adolescents encounter certain gender-specific difficulties while learning to live in remarried families. For example, Bray (1988) reported that girls in remarried families experienced more negative stress and more difficulties in developing relationships with stepfathers than boys. Boys in stepfather families were found to show improvement on measures of adjustment to a greater degree than girls (Hetherington et al., 1985).

The vast majority of cited problems have derived from either observations, case studies, or reports of clinicians, or from empirical research using published questionnaires or instruments which impose researcher-designed constructs or values. Research which allows for the study of constructs as they are experienced and reported by participants rather than defined by researchers is sorely needed (Coleman & Ganong, 1990).

There is little empirical research in the field of remarried families to contribute to our understanding of the general and gender-specific problems as defined by adolescents and their parents and stepparents while adapting to remarried family life.

Given the difficulties associated with the successful adaptation of remarried families with adolescents, the high redivorce rate in families with stepchildren, the gap in the empirical research concerning problems as they are defined by members of remarried families with adolescents, and the few studies which took into account the differences experienced by males and females, this study will, in a small way, address these concerns.

This research is exploratory. The intent is, firstly, to identify the problems experienced by members of remarried families in Edmonton and, secondly, to analyze their reported problems, using a sorting and concept mapping methodology, to determine whether the problems reflect underlying themes. The study is limited due to the inclusion of families from Edmonton only and because the aim is to identify and discuss the problems and themes, not to determine the prevalence or frequency of the problems.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the problems, as reported by mothers, stepfathers and male and female adolescents, in adjusting to living in a remarried or "new" family.

The study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reported problems for each of the four groups (mothers, stepfather, adolescent boys, and adolescent girls)?
2. Are the problems different for mothers and stepfathers and for male and female adolescents? If so, what are the differences?
3. What are the themes underlying the problems identified by mothers, stepfathers, adolescent males and adolescent females?
4. Are the themes different for mothers and stepfathers and for male and female adolescents? If so, what are the differences?

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

In this chapter, the writer presents a descriptive review of the remarried family literature, in general, with a more specific focus on the functioning, dynamics, and relationships which pertain to stepfather families with adolescents.

The remarried family, as part of a process and as a family form, is discussed first. Demographic information, which includes statistics regarding divorce, remarriage, and custody, is then presented, followed by a review of the literature and research. Dynamics related to remarried family dissolution and successful functioning are then addressed. Cited limitations and criticisms of the extant literature are presented. The extant research pertaining to adolescents in remarried families is then discussed, followed by a rationale for and brief description of this research.

The Remarried Family

Major changes have occurred in the past two decades in family living arrangements. Due to increased numbers of births to unmarried women and the dramatically increased rate of divorce and remarriage, more and more children are experiencing life in a family in which the parents are never-married, separated, divorced or remarried.

Remarried families with stepchildren have existed throughout the ages; however, the numbers have grown recently due, specifically, to the increase in divorce (Norton & Glick, 1989). In the last two decades, remarried families have changed from being an alternative family form to a prevalent type of family.

The remarried family is complex, ambiguous and diverse. The terms used throughout the literature to describe the family structure (i.e., binuclear, blended, reconstituted, reconstructed, restructured, recycled, second, step, and remarried) reflect the multiplicity of family form as well as a lack of consensus in the vocabulary which describes it.

The term "remarried" will be used in this paper since this term has been described by Wald (1981) to refer to "a two-parent, two-generation unit that comes into being on the legal remarriage of a person who has biological or adopted children from a prior union with whom he or she is regularly involved" (p. 21).

Remarried families occur in many diverse forms. Without even considering children, eight possible marital status combinations exist: divorced man - single woman, divorced woman - single man, divorced man - divorced woman, widowed man - single woman, widowed woman - single man, widowed man - widowed woman, widowed man - divorced woman, and widowed woman - divorced man (Wald, 1981).

The variations increase significantly when children are factored in. The wife, husband or both may have one or more biological or adopted children from their

previous marriages, either with or without custody or visitation. Children may also be a product of the remarriage.

The process of becoming a remarried family, following divorce, is described by McGoldrick and Carter (1988) as one which involves eight phases: 1) Decision to separate, 2) Actual separation, 3) Legal divorce, 4) Remarriage of either spouse, 5) Shift in custody of any of the children, 6) Moves of either spouse, 7) Illness or death of either spouse, 8) Life cycle transitions of the children, such as graduation, marriages, births, illnesses.

The remarried family is considered different, in terms of structure, function and dynamics, than the nuclear family form. Differences have been discussed by many authors (e.g., Beer, 1988; Goetting, 1982; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Prosen & Farmer, 1982; Sager, Brown, Crohn, Engel, Rodstein & Walker, 1983; Visher & Visher, 1987). When the differences noted by the above authors are combined, they include:

1) Ties each partner has to the previous marriage through children, family and friends, and through continued involvement with the former spouse.
2) The splitting of parental tasks amongst biological (custodial and non-custodial) parents and stepparents.
3) The inclusion of a variety of family members in the extended family structure.

4) A lack of vocabulary for describing the participants in relation to each other.

5) The fact that members belong to more than one family system.

6) The predating of the parent-child relationship to the marital relationship.

7) The ambiguity of roles.

8) The more permeable boundaries between the various subsystems.

In spite of the diversity of family forms, some unique characteristics shared by remarried families have been identified (Cherlin, 1981; Johnson, 1980; Visher & Visher, 1982). Unique characteristics, when combined, include:

1) Complexity, in that many people have many relationships with others whose roles are often changing and unclear.

2) Variability, in terms of the relationships and attachments amongst children, parents, stepparents, extended family and "quasi-kin".

3) Unclear expectations, due to lack of societal prescriptions.

4) Members living together with rites and rituals learned in their former families.

5) Parent-child relationships which predate the marital relationship.

6) The existence of a biological parent who lives elsewhere.

7) Little or no legal relationship between stepparents and stepchildren.

The suggestion is made in the literature that a healthy remarried family allows permeable boundaries so that children can move between households, and former

spouses, friends and in-laws are recognized (e.g., McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). Also, new spouses must accept biological connections, while maintaining marital intimacy and a reorganized parental system which includes biological parents as primary decision-makers. Given the disequilibrium following divorce (or death) and during the creation of a remarried family, the remarried family adaptation process is challenging and often rocky. Adjustment problems and successful remarried families will be discussed in more detail.

Demographic Information

In the past decade, in the United States, about 40% of first marriages ended in divorce and 75% of divorced mothers and 80% of divorced fathers remarried (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan & Anderson, 1989). In Canada, between 1977 and 1987, one-third of marriages ended in divorce and approximately 55% of them involved at least one dependent child (Eichler, 1987). Divorced people remarry three years, on average, following divorce (Norton & Moorman, 1987). In Canada, 26.5% of all marriages involved a previously married partner (Eichler, 1987). Approximately 50% of those who remarry will divorce again (Clingempeel & Brand, 1985). This means that about half the children born in the late 1970s and 1980s, whose parents divorce and remarry, will experience a second parental divorce. It has been projected that 61% of men and 54% of women who were in their thirties during the 1980's will experience divorce twice

(Norton & Moorman, 1987).

In 1987, seventeen percent of children under the age of 18 years, in the United States, lived in remarried families (Glick, 1989). About two-thirds of these remarriages were preceded by cohabitation of parents (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). In the past seven years, the percentage of remarried families with children has decreased slightly, however, this change is thought to be due to an increase in cohabitation which precedes or replaces the remarriage following divorce (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989).

Many factors affect remarriage: age, children, income, gender, education (Spanier & Glick, 1980). Younger women remarry sooner than older women. Women divorced after 40 years of age are not likely to remarry. The more income and education a woman has, the less likely she is to remarry, at any age. Men, however, are more likely to remarry if they earn a good income. Men remarry sooner and more often than women. Their first wives are, on average, three years younger, whereas their second wives are, on average, six years younger. Children seem to be a slight deterrent to remarriage for both genders.

Custody arrangements, despite changing public and legal attitudes in favour of increased father-involvement, have changed little. Nine in ten children live with their mother following divorce (Hetherington et al., 1989). Fathers are not likely to obtain sole custody of children, and although joint legal custody has increased in occurrence, joint physical custody occurs in only about 5% of families (Koel, Clark, Phear, &

Hauser, 1988). Successful joint custody situations are rare; however, research reveals that satisfactory co-parental arrangements correlate with higher income and education levels of the divorced parents (Hetherington, 1989). As the years go by following divorce, the majority of fathers tend to "drop out" of the lives of their children and become "absent fathers", particularly if their former wives remarry (Maccoby, Depner & Mnookin, 1988). Non-custodial biological mothers tend to retain contact with their children in the care of their previous husbands (Furstenberg, 1988).

Split legal custody (the situation in which each parent has physical custody of one or more of their children) is less common than joint legal custody; however, parents in split custody situations tend to maintain contact with their non-custodial children - the siblings of their custodial children (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

About one-third of children who live in remarried families will have a half-sibling (offspring of their parent and stepparent) within four years (Glick, 1989). About the same number of children will live in their second family with stepsiblings (Glick, 1989).

Remarried couples give up on their marriages much sooner than first-time married couples. The divorce rate among remarried couples is 50% higher than for first married couples during the first five years of marriage, 20% higher between five and ten years, and 10% higher at 25 years of marriage (Glick, 1983). The first five years of remarriage appear therefore to be the critical years of adjustment and the statistics imply that remarried family life improves over the years.

Changes in Research Trends

Given the recency and complexity of stepfamily life following divorce, research investigating remarriage and remarried families is relatively new and plagued with incongruencies. Most family research has focused and continues to focus on intact first families, the effects of divorce, and single parent families.

According to Espinoza and Newman (1979), only ten or so studies of stepfamilies appeared in print before 1980. Almost all of the empirical work on stepfamilies has been published in the last decade. By 1990, there were about 200 published studies investigating specific aspects of remarried families (Coleman & Ganong, 1990). Interest in empirically studying the remarried family form, through the use of systematically designed research in which data is gathered, analyzed, and discussed, has grown dramatically. The extant literature also contains an abundance of literature based on impressions, observations, reports, and case studies by clinicians working with remarried families. The clinical literature comprises about half the volume of our current information base (Coleman & Ganong, 1990).

Ganong & Coleman (1986) compared the clinical and empirical literature on children in remarried families and concluded that there is an inconsistency between findings: the clinical literature, overall, reported that "stepchildren and their families are inherently upset by problems and difficulties" (p. 314), whereas the research literature reported few significant differences between stepchildren and children from other family

forms. Coleman and Ganong (1990) more recently compared the empirical studies and found that results within the empirical stream are, at times, inconsistent (discussed below).

The empirical research has been further subdivided into two streams by Coleman and Ganong (1990): problem-oriented and normative-adaptive. The problem-oriented approach was used more often in the first half of the last decade and tended to use "between family structure" designs. The normative-adaptive approach was used more often from 1985 onwards and typically, employed "within family structure" designs.

Empirical Research

Between Family Forms Research, Problem-oriented Approach

Overall, the problem-oriented studies predominate the empirical research. The problem-oriented or deficit comparison approach considers divorce and remarriage as pathogenic lifestyle choices, fraught with social problems. The findings are often inconsistent.

Inconsistent findings have emerged from investigations into both remarried family dynamics and stepchildren's school achievement, health, behaviour, emotions, and attitudes.

The findings from research investigating remarried family cohesion and

adaptability are contradictory. Although cohesion was consistently found to be lower in remarried families than in nuclear families, adaptability was found to be higher in remarried families in Pill's (1990) research and lower in Waldren, Bell, Peek and Sorell's (1990) study.

Educational achievement of stepchildren was found to be slightly lower in children from first marriages in Zill's (1988) and Zimiles and Lee's (1991) studies, but not lower in Ferri's (1984) study when social class was controlled. Zimiles and Lee (1991) found that college students from remarried families were more likely to drop out of college than students from intact families. Drop-out behaviour was found in their study to interact with the gender of the student in combination with the gender of the custodial parent; like gender custodial parent students were more likely to drop out.

Many studies purport that the health, learning and behaviour of stepchildren is normal - as compared to children from intact, nuclear families - but, that there is a significant minority of stepchildren who display serious and chronic emotional disturbances, academic problems and/or conduct problems at home or school (e.g., Brand, Clingempeel & Woodward, 1988; Furstenberg & Allison, 1985; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985; Peterson & Zill, 1986). Stepchildren in Ferri's (1984) and Zill's (1988) studies however, were reported to display more acting out behaviours, e.g., fighting, school absences and expulsions, and more internalizing phenomena, e.g., depression and anxiety, than children in intact families. These findings are based on the impressions of

raters (parents, stepparents, teachers) who knew the children's family structure. Their ratings may have been influenced by expectations based on negative myths and stereotypes about the effects of divorce and remarriage on children.

Children of more educated stepparents were found to have fewer behaviour and learning problems than children of less educated stepparents (Zill, 1988). Other studies report no significant differences at all in terms of developmental problems (Bohannon, 1975), social behaviour (Santrock, Warshak, Lindberg & Meadows, 1982) or attitude toward marriage and divorce (Coleman & Ganong, 1984) between stepchildren and children from first marriages.

Santrock, et al., (1982) suggested that parenting behaviour, sex of child, and marital conflict are more highly correlated with children's social behaviour than is family form. Pardeck, Brown, Christian, Schnurbusch, Shrum & Terrell, (1991) however, found that, from a retrospective point of view, adult children from non-intact families are more likely to have lower levels of life satisfaction than those from intact families.

One more tentatively conclusive finding has emerged from the problem-oriented research. Stepchildren's self-esteem and intelligence are not dissimilar to self-esteem and intelligence of children from other family forms (Bray, 1988; Coleman & Ganong, 1990).

Within Stepfamily Research, Normative-adaptive Approach

The research based on a normative-adaptive perspective focuses primarily on describing and understanding remarried family relationships. The adaptive perspective considers remarriage as a normal lifestyle choice which is not necessarily problematic or pathological. Some conclusive and positive findings have emerged; however, overall, the findings from this approach to the study of remarried families are also inconsistent and inconclusive.

Emotional bonds between stepparents and stepchildren were found to be less close than parent-child bonds (Ganong & Coleman, 1987) and ratings of stepchildren's behaviours by stepparents were more negative than ratings of natural children's behaviours by biological parents (Perkins & Kahan, 1979). Flinn (1988) found that stepfathers interact more positively with their natural children than with their stepchildren and Ferri (1984) concluded that stepparent-stepchild relations are more likely to be characterized by conflict than parent-child relations. Non-custodial stepfathers had more difficulties in their steprelationships than stepfathers who brought children, either full- or part-time, into the remarried family (Clingempeel, Glen, Ievoli & Brand, 1984a). Stepfathers have also been found to be more likely to neglect or abuse (physical and sexual) their stepchildren than their biological children (Lightcap, Kurland & Burgess, 1982).

On the positive side though, Seltzer and Bianchi (1988) found that for many

stepchildren, the stepparents become a positive substitute for the nonresidential biological parent when there is little contact with the biological parent.

When contact between noncustodial parents and children was maintained, Schwebel, Fine and Renner (1991) found that from the perspective of adult, college student stepchildren, stepparents were less supportive and less involved in problem situations than were biological parents. This may be, in part, because children were found to hold emotional attachments to their stepfathers or their fathers, but not to both (White, Brinkerhoff & Booth, 1985) and, in part, due to the absence of biological ties and bonding in early childhood. Also, Anderson and White (1986) found that more functional stepfamilies had less intense stepfather-child relationships than did father and children in intact first families.

With regard to stress, Strother and Jacobs (1984) found that discipline was the most stressful and social issues were the least stressful issues for children in remarried families. Lutz (1983) found that divided loyalties and discipline were the most stressful issues experienced by children and being a member of two households was perceived as being least stressful.

A number of studies have shown that a father's continued involvement with his children is associated with a positive outcome for the children (Ahrons, 1983; Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978); however, other studies have found little relationship between children's adjustment and

regular contact with the noncustodial parent (Furstenberg, Morgan & Allison, 1987; Kurdek & Berg, 1983).

In Clingempeel and Segal's (1986) study, no significant differences were found in emotional and psychological well-being between stepfather and stepmother households. In contrast, Zill's (1988) study found, according to reports from teachers and mothers, that children in stepfather families show more problems in home and school. In other studies, stepfathers were found to be more likely than stepmothers to have good relationships with stepchildren (Ambert, 1986; Hobart, 1987) independent of household. As has been previously noted, stepfather households predominate, since the majority of biological children live with mothers following divorce and remarriage. Large scale comparative samples are therefore difficult to attain.

Overall, remarried couples report more positive relationship with the wife's than the husband's prior marriage children, with shared-child relationship the most positive of all (Hobart, 1991). The quality of stepparent-child relations was not affected, positively or negatively, by reproduction in remarriage in Ahrons & Wallisch's study (1987), but in Duberman's (1975) study, stepparent and parent-child relations were more positive when the remarried couple had children of their own.

Stepfather involvement with stepchildren, although found to be lower in support and discipline than biological fathers in intact families, was positively associated with the number of years stepfamilies had been together (Amato, 1987). There is also evidence

though that stepparent-child relations get worse over time (Guisinger, Cowan, & Schildberg, 1989; Hetherington, et al., 1985). This finding is more significant for women than for men and may be due to stepmothers developing a more pessimistic perspective toward stepmothering and a more negative attitude toward their stepchildren over time (Guisinger, et al., 1989).

Although the majority of research has found that noncustodial father/child contact decreases over time following remarriage (e.g., Furstenberg & Spanier, 1987), Bray and Berger (1990) found no differences in contact or relationship quality with noncustodial fathers or paternal grandparents for boys and girls or at different points after remarriage (during, at least, the first seven years of remarriage).

Stepparent-stepdaughter relationships were found to be more problematic than stepparent-stepson relationships (Clingempeel, Brant and Ievoli, 1984b) in spite of some findings which report that boys are more adversely affected (i.e., demonstrate more aggressive and dependence) by divorce and remarriage than are girls (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Bray's study (1988) revealed that girls in stepfamilies reported more negative stress than boys in stepfamilies or girls in nuclear families. Although stepdaughters reported more difficulties than stepsons in dealing with their stepfathers (Clingempeel, et al., 1984b), stepmother-stepdaughter relationships were found to be the most problematic of all remarried family relationship (Brand, Clingempeel & Woodward, 1988; Duberman, 1975).

Crosbie-Burnett (1984) found that a good relationship between the children and stepfather had a greater overall effect on family happiness than the quality of the marital relationship. Guisinger, Cowan & Schuldberg (1989) however, found that satisfaction with remarriage and marital harmony had the primary positive relationship with the quality of family life. Hobart's (1991) data suggests that adjustment, in spite of the many stresses inherent in remarriage (e.g., difficulties with rearing stepchildren, financial stresses), is not significantly more demanding than in first married families because in remarital relationships, difficulties tend to be accommodated by husbands. He hypothesizes that wives in remarried families are less compliant and have more leverage than in first married relationship, and husbands have greater needs and are more willing to "give in" and keep the peace.

Cause/effect factors in remarried family relations are very difficult to determine due to the complexity of factors and interrelationships and the circularity involved in family functioning. This, at least in part, likely accounts for the inconsistent and inconclusive findings in the "within stepfamily" research. Overall some conclusions can be reached: a) Stepdaughters have a more difficult adjustment to remarried family life and to living with a stepfather than stepsons; b) emotional connections between stepparents and stepchildren are not as close as parent-child bonds; and c) when there is no contact with a biological father, the stepfather can become a positive "father figure" substitute.

Clinical Literature

The clinical literature consists of general reviews and descriptive information contained in essays (e.g., Beer, 1988), clinical observations (e.g., McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Visher & Visher, 1987, 1990), reports (e.g., Sager, Walker, Brown, Crohn, Rodstein, 1981) and case studies (e.g., McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

The clinical literature focuses on the problems encountered by both parents and children in remarried families. Many years ago, Bitterman (1968) observed that children's difficulties arose out of the disruption of their normal development of living and being loved, loyalty conflicts between the bioparent and the stepparent, and the problems they experienced in dealing with their parents' sexuality.

Following Bitterman's observations in the 1960s, other problems have been added. Kompara (1980) suggested that children often feel displaced by the new stepparent. Visher and Visher (1990) found that children have continuous difficulties: i) understanding just where they fit in the many family systems to which they belong; ii) overcoming feelings of guilt over causing the divorce; and iii) overcoming fantasies of a reunion of their natural parents. Sager et al. (1983) suggested that children in remarried families experience fears related to their living situations: fears of incest, fears of another abandonment or loss, and the fear of the unknown aspect of the future. Pseudomutuality (pretending that problems or conflicts do not exist) has been observed as one kind of defense against such fears and can result in a denial of problems and an

illusion of satisfactory functioning in remarried families.

Poor adjustment of children in remarried families has been associated with denial of the significance of the loss of the first family, little time between marriages, lack of resolution of relationship issues in the first family, and expectations that the adjustment to the new marriage will be quick and easy (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). Clinically, children have been found to react to maladjustment in a variety of ways, including the following: withdrawal from family and peers, depression, behaviour problems (often aggressive or delinquent behaviours), school problems (e.g., reduced academic achievement, acting out), psychosomatic illness, and substance abuse, depending upon the constitutional, intrapsychic, historical, interactional and environmental factors affecting the child (Sager, et al., 1983).

Overall, the clinical literature indicates that preschool and adult children adapt most easily to divorce and remarriage, although girls of any age generally have a more difficult adjustment than boys. Children of latency age were seen to have the most difficulty resolving feelings of divided loyalty (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976), whereas adolescents were found to encounter the greatest problems with sexuality (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). Overall, adjustment to remarried family life appears to be most difficult for families with adolescents (Visher & Visher, 1979, 1987).

Stepfamily Dissolution

Several hypotheses have attempted to explain why divorces in remarriages are more likely than in first marriages. Cherlin (1980) proposed that remarriage breakdown occurs due to the "incomplete institutionalization of marriage" or a lack of social regulation or cultural guidelines for remarriage. Cherlin identifies specific areas of normative disorder: the absence of terminology to define kinship, lack of guidelines for interaction between former spouses and between present and past spouses, the interfacing and competing roles of parents and stepparents, and the problem of the potential for incest among members in remarried families.

Schwebel, et al., (1991) studied stepparents' perceptions of their parental roles and did, indeed, find that the lack of conventional wisdom or social consensus about how stepfamilies should operate leads to disappointments, conflicts, and stress.

Visher and Visher (1979) attributed the difficulties which precipitate dissolution to the stresses inherent in the complex stepfamily structure and the unrealistic attempt to model remarried families on nuclear family norms.

Crosbie-Burnett (1984) suggested that poor or conflictual step relationships may be the crux of the unsuccessful remarriage; "children's difficulties in remarried family life are negatively associated with successful remarriage" (p. 459). Duberman (1975) also found that remarriage satisfaction is highly dependent on stepparent-stepchild relationships. White and Booth (1985) found that remarried couples with stepchildren

were more than twice as likely than remarried couples without stepchildren to redivorce.

Clingempeel and Brand (1985) found that the probability of remarital dissolution correlated positively with the structural complexity of the remarried family (e.g., each spouse bringing children from a previous marriage into the remarriage) and the frequency of contact between remarried persons and their quasi-kin (former spouses, husbands and wives of former spouses, and blood kin of former spouses).

Furstenberg and Spanier (1987) suggest that couples in second marriages may be more predisposed to terminate an unhappy situation, i.e., that the divorce experience itself "alters the prevailing - although possibly waning - standard that a marriage should be preserved until death do us part" (p. 192). They suggest that the lack of institutional norms for remarried families may in fact, be associated less with dissolution and more with the opportunity for family members to create their own unique adaptive mechanisms, resources, and inventive responses to "culturally uncharted situations" (p. 194). Institutionalization, in this context, is understood more as a continuously changing process than as a fixed state, and individuals are seen as "creators and destroyers of social institutions, not merely conveyers and obeyers of social understandings" (p. 194).

Successful Remarried Families

Many clinicians have discussed the challenges or tasks involved in the successful integration of the remarried family household. These challenges have been summarized

by Visher and Visher (1990):

a) a solidification and maturation of the new couple relationship;

b) the maintenance or enhancement of the previously existing parent\child bonds;

c) the development of new step relationships;

d) the development of a sense of membership in the new family;

e) the establishment of "supra family relationships" or other households connected with each other through children (the other parent, and relatives such as grandparents);

f) continued contact between children and their non-residential parent;

g) the establishment of a cooperative parenting coalition between the children's households.

A successful remarried family is defined as a family which has "dealt effectively with these challenges so that a majority of those in the household are generally satisfied with their new family constellation" (Visher & Visher, 1990, p. 5). Mills (1984) and Crosbie-Burnett (1984) observed that in well-functioning families, stepchildren as well as stepparents are satisfied with different types of relationships in their family systems.

Satisfactory adjustment is believed to be associated with: successful grieving of losses and letting go of the past by overcoming denial and abandonment issues, realistic expectations as the remarried family integrates, a strongly unified couple, establishment

of constructive rituals, the formation of satisfactory step-relations, and cooperation amongst the separate households based on permeable but clearly delineated boundaries (Visher & Visher, 1990; Sager, et al., 1983; Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987).

The process of remarriage is considered to be one of the most difficult developmental transitions for families to negotiate. Contraindications to successful adjustment (Sager, et al., 1983), such as mental illness, substance addiction, family violence, child abuse, and irreconcilable disagreement about child-rearing, are serious problems in any family life; however, many difficulties can be overcome or resolved in order to restructure and reorganize relationships and day to day living in a remarried household. Successful remarried family functioning relies primarily on the assumption that divorced parents are responsible adults who can cooperate with each other for the sake of their children. It is important that families become aware of the complexities and challenges inherent in the formation of this family structure so that expectations are realistic.

Adolescents in Remarried Families

No qualitative investigations studying adolescents' perceptions of the process of adapting to remarried families have been found in the existing research. The clinical literature does, however, discuss clinician's observations of adolescents' reported experiences and parents' accounts of adolescent issues. A few quantitative studies have

reported findings pertaining specifically to adolescents in their samples.

Clinicians (e.g. McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Sager, et al., 1983; Visher & Visher, 1979; Wald, 1981) have claimed that the adjustment to a remarried family is most difficult, for both the adults and children, for remarried families with adolescents. Sager, et al., (1983) observed that adolescents, as opposed to children of other ages, have the most difficulty adapting to a remarried family and they consider the experience of being an adolescent in a remarried family as more challenging and very different from the experience of being an adolescent in a nuclear family. Visher & Visher (1978) suggest that adolescent stepchildren have a greater negative impact on remarriage than do younger children. Wald (1981) observed that many reapplications for remarried family counselling occur when stepchildren become adolescents.

Adolescence is the period of "identity vs. identity confusion" (Erikson, 1950), emerging sexuality, and individuation (Visher & Visher, 1979). It is the phase along the continuum to adult functioning in which an individual begins to separate from the family. Separating from two remarried families can create added tension for adolescents and families. Difficulties and conflicts can arise when a remarried family is attempting to establish or redefine bonds, cohesiveness and a sense of collective identity while the adolescents are concerned with separation and individuation issues.

Sager, et al., (1983) suggests that emerging sexuality can be problematic for adolescents in remarried families. Sexual attraction to stepparents or stepsiblings can

lead to guilt, withdrawal and hostility, and to a repression of positive emotions. The actual involvement in sexual activity can occur as well, and can lead to governmental, legal and/or counselling interventions.

Research findings are mixed. Studies have found that adolescents in remarried families: a) report more alcohol use (Burnside, Baer, McLaughlin & Pokorny, 1986); b) are more willing to engage in antisocial behaviour and are more prone to peer influence (Steinberg, 1987); and c) marry younger (Michael & Tuma, 1985) than teenagers from nuclear families. McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) however, found that living with a stepparent was not related to adolescent marriage or divorce. Kinaird and Gerrard (1986) reported that female stepchildren in college were more likely to have premarital intercourse than females from nuclear families, whereas Booth, Brinkerhoff and White (1984), after controlling for several family background variables, found no difference in premarital intercourse between stepchildren and children from nuclear families.

Pill (1990) studied remarried families with custodial adolescent stepchildren by having husbands, wives and adolescents complete instruments to quantitatively measure stepfamily cohesion and adaptability and family and marital satisfaction. She then undertook a qualitative content analysis of interview data gathered from husbands and wives to investigate the development of family identity and the revision of basic assumptions about family life. She did not gather qualitative data from the adolescents and was not therefore able to study adolescents' perceptions of the issues of family

identity and change in assumptions about family life.

Limitations of the Literature and Research

Although literature and research in the remarried family field have grown and there are now signs of emerging norms, the process of remarried family formation and the dynamics of remarried family life are still not well understood (Dahl, Cowgill & Asmundsson, 1987).

A criticism in the state of the knowledge in the area is attributed by Gelles (1982) to the "Whoozle effect" which occurs when a particular clinical observation is treated as a fact although the findings had not been replicated empirically. Many myths exist in the remarried family field based simply on impressions, particularly negative myths.

One seminal example relates to the notion that stepchildren experience loyalty conflict as they attempt to reconcile attachment to biological (residential and non-residential) parents and to stepparents. This "fact" was not experimentally tested until it was confirmed in Lutz's (1983) empirical research.

Research to date has been limited by methodological problems which derive from the attempt to study the complex processes of remarried family life. The variability of remarried family forms in remarriage (which results in difficulty even conceptualizing remarried family functioning) poses significant problems in the design of systematic studies.

The complexity of residential and extended family relationships and dynamics also account for the difficulties researching the area and also for the lack of a new paradigm for understanding remarried families. In addition, there are no established patterns or sets of rituals to explain the complex stages of family formation and relationship terms for new family members (Cherlin, 1980).

Most remarried family studies failed to account for the effects of the timing of remarriage, the age and developmental status of children, the life stage of parents, the perspective of parents on remarriage as either a discrete event or part of a transition from a previous marriage, and the perspectives of children vis a vis family membership (Hetherington & Camara, 1984).

Coleman and Ganong (1990) suggest that the current state of the research has also been limited by the overuse of the "problem-oriented, between family type, cross-sectional design that has become the standard approach" (p. 937) to investigate remarried family functioning. They insist that change in the approach to remarried research is needed in the 1990's and recommend that longitudinal research, multitrait, multilevel designs, or descriptive qualitative studies are needed for the purpose of overcoming some of the limitations seen in the research to date.

This research is designed to respond to some of the critiques of the extant research and suggestions for further research . The research is an investigation of the problems experienced by family members as they attempted to adapt to living in a remarried

family. Due to the multiplicity of remarried family forms and the many stages of childhood, the study is restricted to stepfather families (the most prevalent of all forms) with adolescents (the most challenging developmental stage for successful adjustment). The study is exploratory and aims only to identify and discuss the problems and themes rather than to determine the prevalence or frequency of such problems. Participants are from Edmonton only.

Data will be collected through the use of an open-ended questionnaire in an attempt to avoid researcher bias when determining the actual problems encountered. The data will be based on the reported experiences and perceptions of four groups: mothers, stepfathers, adolescent boys and adolescent girls. The four groups of problems will then be sorted into themes by family therapists and the theme sorts will be statistically analyzed, to find the overall commonality of themes, using Trochim's (1989) Concept Mapping methodology. Concept mapping appears to be a well suited method to determine the themes which underlie the problems reported by mothers, stepfathers, adolescent boys and adolescent girls in remarried families as it allows for the statistical, objective clustering of qualitative data into underlying themes and does not rely on the subjective judgement of the researcher (Newsom & Kunkel, 1991). Concept mapping therefore adds objectivity to the analysis of qualitative data.

Given the difficulties associated with the successful adaptation of remarried families, particularly those with adolescents, the high redivorce rate in families with

stepchildren, and the gap in the research concerning family members', especially adolescents', reported experiences of their remarried families, I anticipate that this research will provide information of value to family life educators and clinicians counselling remarried families as well as to members of remarried families themselves.

CHAPTER III

Methodology and Design

This study was undertaken in order to investigate the problems in adjusting to living in a remarried or "new" family as reported by male and female adolescents and their mothers and stepfathers. Specifically, the objectives were: i) to identify the problems, ii) to determine whether the problems reflect underlying themes, and if so, to identify the themes, iii) to establish whether the problems and themes are different for male and female adolescents, and for biological mothers and stepfathers.

In order to meet the objectives, this study was conducted in two parts. Part one involved the collection and organization of experiential data as reported by members of remarried families, and part two the sorting and analysis of the data into themes, illustrated via concept maps, using the Concept Mapping software (Trochim, 1989). The study was approved following ethical reviews by The University of Alberta and The Family Centre.

Part One

The objective of part one was to collect the problems as they were identified by participating members of remarried families.

Participants

Participants in part one were adolescent males and females, and mothers and stepfathers from post-divorce remarried families. Twenty-four families were initially recruited for the study, as twenty-four was considered to be a large enough number to ensure that all problems would be identified and the saturation point for reported problems would be attained. The number twenty-four was chosen because the existing literature suggests that remarried families experience many problems in common. Twenty-four was considered a large enough number to capture the common and also any unique problems.

The list was considered to be complete once the reported problems became redundant. Redundancy was reached using the same process for each of the four groups. The first list of problems was reviewed and all discrete problems were entered on to a master list. The next list of problems was considered for any problems not identified on the first list. Any new problems were added. The third list was then perused for any problems not already identified. Once again, new problems were added. This process continued until all problems reported on the forms were contained in the master list. More families would need to be recruited if unique problems were still being identified after the data was compiled from the first eighteen families. This situation would indicate that there was more variability in the problems than had been expected. More families would therefore be needed to ensure that the saturation point for problems had been

reached.

Although post-divorce remarried families occur in many diverse forms, one type of family structure was selected for this study in order to secure adequate numbers of people in each of the within-family member groups. As stepfather families are the most prevalent remarried family form (Visher & Visher, 1990), all remarried families contained biological mothers and stepfathers. No families contained biological children of the stepfathers who lived in the remarried family.

The adolescents were between twelve and eighteen years of age and lived full or half time in the remarried family. Twelve is generally considered to be the onset of adolescence psychologically (Sager et. al., 1981) and legally.

Participants were required to have lived at least two years in their current remarried family. A minimum of two years was selected since the literature (e.g., Visher & Visher, 1990; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988) suggests that adjustment takes between two and five years. Participating adolescents were therefore 10 years old or younger when their mothers remarried. A good part of the children's experience was in their remarried family form. The families who actually participated had been living in their remarried family forms for between two and nine years. For some of the adolescents, the majority of their lives were spent in their remarried families.

Families were recruited in accordance with inclusion criteria (i.e., remarried a minimum of two years, stepfather families containing the mother's adolescent children

between 12 and 18 years of age) through individuals known to the researcher, who live in remarried families, or who knew people living in remarried families, and also through clients of The Family Centre.

The Family Centre is a non-profit family agency in Edmonton, Alberta which provides therapy to a large, generic clientele. The agency does not have any religious or political affiliations. The Family Centre employs 150 people and is accredited by The Council for Services to Families and Children, an American accreditation organization.

Families were selected to represent a cross section of remarried families. Some families were engaged in family therapy, presumably experiencing some difficulties either related or unrelated to living in their family forms. The assumption was that these families were in therapy in order to make changes or to resolve or accept their problems thereby enhancing family functioning and improving the probability of remaining intact as a remarried family. Some were functioning without involvement in therapy and were, presumably, either avoiding their difficulties or, otherwise, functioning satisfactorily.

Since the families had survived the first two years of remarried family life, it was assumed that many of the initial challenges associated with adaptation and reorganization had been successfully achieved.

The families who were known by the researcher or by acquaintances of the researcher represented a wide range of society, and included a diversity of educational, socio-economic, and career histories. Members from many of these families signed their

problems forms. To protect anonymity, the backgrounds of Family Centre clients were unknown to the researcher.

Sixteen individuals in remarried families were contacted by the researcher or through acquaintances of the researcher and invited to participate. Eight clients in remarried families from The Family Centre were invited to participate by their family therapists. Each family included one mother and one stepfather as well as one or more adolescents. The number of adolescents in the families varied between one and four. There were therefore a total of 18 male adolescents and 21 female adolescents living in the participating families.

Procedure

A package of forms was either provided to clients by therapists following their therapy sessions at The Family Centre, or sent by mail to each mother, stepfather, adolescent male and adolescent female in the remarried families. Each package contained a letter explaining the study (see Appendix A), a demographic information form (see Appendix B), and a form containing instructions for writing out the problems experienced in adjusting to the remarried family (see Appendix C). Of the 24 remarried families who received forms, 20 chose to participate (five client families and fifteen non-client families).

Potential participants were informed, via a letter to each person in the family, that

their participation was completely voluntary and totally anonymous, that they were under no obligation whatsoever to participate, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The instructions on the forms requested that each family member complete the form individually, so that he or she was not influenced by other family members. Each person was then requested to insert the completed form in the envelope provided to her or him and return it to the researcher.

Although many people did sign their forms, participants were not requested to identify themselves on any form. The package of forms was provided to each individual family member. Once in the hands of family members, the researcher had no control over whether parents put expectations on adolescents to participate. It is possible that some adolescents completed the forms in response to their mother's or stepfather's requests rather than as a result of their own volition.

Participants were asked to complete the Demographic and Problem forms, and leave them at The Family Centre or return them by return-addressed, pre-paid post. A separate envelope was provided to each individual and each participant returned the form in the individual envelope provided, which suggests that, in accordance with instructions, each family member completed the form independently, or, at a minimum, returned them individually.

The demographic form asked for the age and gender of the respondents together with the length of time they lived in the remarried family and the ages of children in the

family.

A open-ended questionnaire method was chosen to generate the problems. The wording of the written instruction for completing the questionnaire was chosen to be as open-ended as possible and avoid creating a mind-set for answering. It read:

> I am presently living in a remarried family. Following the marriage, I experienced the following problems as I learned to live in the "new" family form.

Kidder (1981) identified the advantages of this approach as opposed to interviews. It ensures greater neutrality and anonymity so that respondents may feel freer to express themselves; it avoids potential interviewer bias; and ample time is available for the participants to consider their responses and return them to the researcher.

Since the respondents had all lived at least two years in the remarried family, they were identifying the problems retrospectively. Several people indicated on the bottom of their forms that many of the problems had been resolved over time through perseverance and hard work and that the end result had been worth the struggle.

Since the exercise was problem-focused, and had the potential of provoking difficult thoughts or feelings, participants were informed that they could discuss any issues or concerns which they might have experienced when completing the forms with their therapists or with the researcher. Just one family member, a mother, made contact to debrief and further discuss the exercise.

Upon receipt of forms from 20 families, the researcher completed four master lists

of problems, one for mothers, one for stepfathers, one for adolescent boys and one for adolescent girls. The lists were considered to be exhaustive once the cited problems became redundant, i.e., no new problems were being added.

Mothers' List of Problems

The mothers' list of problems was formulated first. From the 20 families who participated, forms were returned by 19 mothers. The mothers' master list contained 29 problems.

The problems from the first mother's form were itemized on a master list. The first mother identified twelve problems, all of which were discreet problems and therefore included. Four problems, from the second mother's form which were not identified on the first mother's form, were added to the list. The third mother's form was reviewed for any items not already included on the list, and five new problems were added. This procedure continued until no new problems were identified. The mothers' problems were exhausted once the seventh mother's problems were added. The problems from the twelve subsequent mother's lists were considered, but no new problems were identified. As different mothers worded the same problem in a number of ways, each problem was considered very carefully for meaning to ensure that it was not a "new" problem.

Once the list of problems was complete, four family therapists reviewed it to

ensure that each problem was distinct and that there were no repetitions or redundancies, i.e., that each problem was discrete. Although three of the four therapists found some problems which appeared to be contained within another problem, there was variation, amongst therapists, as to which items overlapped. Since not one problem was deemed by more than one therapist to be repetitive, all items were included in the final list.

Stepfathers' List of Problems

The procedure for accumulating the stepfathers' problems followed the same format. Forms were returned by 20 fathers. Fourteen problems from the first stepfather's form were entered on a master list. The second stepfather's form identified five different problems. They were added to the master list. Any previously unidentified problems were added as the stepfathers' forms were reviewed. Although all of the forms were reviewed, the stepfathers' problems were exhausted once the problems identified by six stepfathers were considered.

As with the mothers' problems, each problem was considered very carefully for meaning to ensure that it was not a "new" problem. The stepfathers' list contained a total of 24 problems. The list was checked by the same four family therapists for any repetitions. None was found.

Male Adolescents' List of Problems

Forms were returned from 14 of the 18 boys living in the participating families. The adolescent males tended to identify fewer problems on their forms. This is likely a consequence of several variables. The boys tended to include fewer personal and more interactional problems (e.g., my stepdad is too strict) which are less specific and broader (more inclusive) in scope. Also, they may have felt pressured to participate by their parents, and perhaps experienced less enthusiasm for the task. Of course, they may simply have experienced fewer problems overall.

The first boy's list reported five discreet problems. The second boy's list identified a total of six problems, three of which had not been reported by the first boy and were added to the master list. The third boy's list contained eight problems, four of which were added. This process continued until the eighth list was reviewed, after which there were no redundancies. The male adolescents generated a total of 18 problems. The wording of each problem was considered carefully, to ensure that each seemingly redundant problem was not, in fact, a "new" problem.

Female Adolescents' List of Problems

The girl's problem (save one exception) were exhausted after the problems were itemized from five problem forms. There were 21 girls who received forms to complete. Eighteen of the 21 returned forms to the researcher. A total of 23 problems

were identified by the girls. The girls tended to include a higher number of problems on their forms than the boys. This may indicate that the girls experienced more problems while learning to live in their remarried families, or perhaps, that they spent more time and energy on the task. Also, their problems tended to be more personal and specific.

The first girl's list identified eleven problems. The second girl's list contained four new problems. The third identified four new problems, the fourth, two, and the fifth, one. As for the mothers, stepfathers, and boys, the girl's problems were worded in many different ways and care was necessary to avoid missing a new problem. One problem, i.e., "My stepdad was sexually inappropriate", was subsequently identified on only the ninth girl's list. This problem was included on the master list although it was reported by only one girl because the literature (e.g., Lightcap, Kurland & Burgess, 1982) reports that sexual abuse is a more prevalent problem in remarried than in first married families.

One family therapist judged two of the items to overlap on the girl's master list, but since none of the other three did so, all items were included.

Part Two

Procedure

Since the experiential data generated in Part One were expected to fall into themes, the first objective of Part Two was to have the four groups of problems (those

identified by mothers, stepfathers, male adolescents and female adolescents) sorted into themes using a sorting method. The second objective of Part Two was to analyze the thematic groupings to develop a concept map of the themes.

Methodology

The problems generated in part one were displayed on four master lists, one for mothers, one for stepfathers, one for male adolescents and one for female adolescents.

The researcher provided each therapist with four lists of problems, one list for each group, and verbal instructions for grouping the problems into themes.

The therapists were instructed to use their own judgments to determine whether the problems in each group fell into themes based on similarity of content and meaning, and if so, to group problems into themes. Therapists assigned numbers to each problem, giving the same number to items which were considered to be in the same theme group.

The therapists were advised that if they chose to do so, they could provide a semantic label for the themes, but that a label was not required for the data analysis. A total of 25 family therapists, 14 women and 11 men (each with a minimum of a Masters degree in psychology, social work or family therapy) completed the theme sorting tasks for each of the four groups, making a total of 100 theme sorts. Family therapists were chosen to undertake the theme sorts, since their familiarity with remarried family issues was thought to contribute to a meaningful organization of the problems into themes. The

therapists were aware of which group they were sorting (i.e., mothers, stepfathers, male adolescents, female adolescents). Since the sorts were completed by 14 female therapists and 11 male therapists, perception based on gender differences which might have affected how the items were sorted was not considered to be an issue.

The commonality of themes contained in the results of the 100 sorts was derived through the use of the statistical analysis method, concept mapping.

Concept Mapping

Concept mapping, a statistical analysis method used to cluster groups into underlying themes, was used to find the commonality of themes contained in the results of the 100 sorts produced by the 25 family therapists. Each of the four groups was analyzed separately using Concept Mapping software (Trochim, 1989) to produce cluster analyses and maps for each of the four groups.

Concept mapping is a set of statistical methods which allows for the clustering of qualitative data, or experiences as they are reported by participants rather than defined by researchers, into underlying themes (Trochim, 1989a). Trochim (1989a) claims that concept mapping methods add objectivity to the analysis of qualitative data which is typically analyzed by researchers using subjective judgment without the use of statistical methodology. Trochim (1989) outlines the five steps which are involved in the

development of concept maps: 1) preparation (which includes the selection of participants and development of focus for the conceptualization; 2) the generation of statements; 3) the structuring of statements; 4) the representation of statements in the form of a concept map; and 5) the interpretation of the map. These five steps were applied in this research as follows: 1) participants were mothers, stepfathers, and adolescents in remarried families and the focus was the problems that they faced as they adapted to remarried family life; 2) the problem statements were identified by family members in writing on a problem form; 3) the statements for each of the four groups were sorted into themes by 25 family therapists, making a total of 100 sorts (i.e., the therapists were instructed to number each item, assigning the same number to items which were considered to be in the same category based on similarity in content and meaning); 4) four concept maps, one for each group, were generated following the entry of the therapists' theme sorts into Trochim's (1989) Concept Mapping software program; and 5) the maps were interpreted.

Concept mapping was used by Newsom and Kunkel (1991) when they investigated the presenting problems at a University psychology clinic. Concept mapping was also used to research the patterns across symptoms for people suffering from panic (Trochim, 1988), and to explore the issues which college students perceive as important (Trochim, 1989a). Another investigation explored the problems encountered by the elderly and used concept mapping to analyze the data (Trochim, 1989b). Concept mapping appears to be well suited to determining the themes which underlie the problems reported by adolescent

and parental members of stepfather families.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the problems experienced by mothers, stepfathers, adolescent males and adolescent females as they adapted to living in stepfather remarried families and then to determine and discuss the themes underlying the problems for each of the four groups. Specifically, the study was designed to answer the following questions:

1) What are the problems faced by mothers, stepfathers, and adolescent boys and girls while learning to live in a remarried or "new" family?
2) Are the problems different for mothers and stepfathers and for male and female adolescents?
3) What are the themes underlying the problems identified by mothers, stepfathers, adolescent males and adolescent females?
4) Are the themes different for mothers and stepfathers and for male and female adolescents?

In order to answer the questions, the study was conducted in two parts. The results will therefore be reported in the corresponding two parts and integrated in a final discussion.

Part One

The problem forms returned by mothers, stepfathers, adolescent males and adolescent females from the 20 participating remarried families were used as the basis for creating the master lists of problems for each of the four groups.

The forms returned by client and non-client families were distinguishable as a consequence of the method through which the forms were returned. All of the non-client family members returned their forms by mail and the client family members left their forms with their therapists which were returned to the researcher by hand.

It was therefore possible to compare the problems identified by client and non-client families. The same problems (with the exception of sexual abuse) were reported in these two groups, which indicates that remarried families, whether in therapy or not in therapy, tend to experience the same kinds of problems.

Why one family would engage in therapy and another not, is open to speculation. Hypotheses to account for the difference include: a) client families may experience the problems to a greater degree and require assistance to make changes or accept what can not be changed; b) non-client families may function more adequately in general and find themselves better equipped to cope with or resolve the problems; c) the non-client families may have minimized the problems and their effect on individual family members; or d) cost of therapy.

Description of the Mothers' Problems

Nineteen mothers, from twenty participating remarried families, returned forms to the researcher. The mothers' list of problems was completed following the inclusion of problems identified on the first seven mother's forms. All problems identified on the twelve remaining forms were redundant, i.e., had already been identified (with one exception).

One mother's situation was exceptional (and very sad). She reported that she had been diagnosed with a brain tumour shortly following the remarriage. Many of the problems identified in this family were unique and attributed to her illness rather than to adapting to remarried family life, generally, The unique illness-related problems for the mother (e.g., impatient with the children after chemotherapy treatments) and for other family members in this particular family were not included in the lists.

The mothers' list of 29 problems is displayed below, in Table 1.

Table 1

Mothers' List of Problems

1. Feeling "caught in the middle" between my children and my husband.
2. I was anxious about my children fitting in with his family.
3. My stepson sexually abused my daughter.
4. We were all different and disconnected.
5. I had ties with my previous family which had no meaning for my husband.

6. We were not a "family" in which my husband was the father.
7. I mistrusted that my husband really "loved" my children and truly had their best interest at heart.
8. Arguments between my and his children.
9. I had more responsibility.
10. Money matters (budgeting, spending, saving, etc).
11. Different ideas about leisure activities.
12. My husband and I differed regarding acceptable aggression levels for the children.
13. Methods and styles of disciplining and parenting.
14. Noise level in the home.
15. Foods and cooking.
16. There were no models for what our family "should" be like.
17. Spending couple-time discussing children, not us.
18. Finding private time for myself.
19. My children misbehaving more often.
20. Finding time to spend together alone with my husband.
21. Sense of betraying my children by spending less time with them and more time with my husband.
22. Thinking that his parents and family did not like me.

23. My children "hated" their stepfather and I found it very stressful because I wanted us all to get along.
24. Still connected to my children's father.
25. I felt like an outsider in his family.
26. My husband sexually abused my daughter.
27. Attraction between stepchildren of opposite genders.
28. His ex-wife interfered with our family.
29. My husband expected me to do the majority of the domestic and child-rearing tasks.

Discussion of the Mothers' Problems

The problems on the mothers' list became redundant quickly, once the seventh mother's form was included. This indicates that the mothers' problems were high in commonality, i.e. it took few families to identify all of the problems. This finding is consistent with the literature which suggests that the problems identified are experienced by the majority of mothers in remarried families (e.g., McGoldrick & Carter, 1988, Visher & Visher, 1979).

The mothers reported a higher number of problems than the stepfathers, boys or girls. Since mothers continue to be the primary caregivers in families, independent of family form, (Amato, 1987), and to be the central figure in family life, highly involved

in day to day domestic activities, it is understandable that they would come into contact with the challenge of experiencing the greatest number of problems.

Also accounting for the higher quantity of problems, the mothers' problems tended to be fairly specific and personal (e.g., #9, more responsibility, #18 lack of private time for self, #24, continued bond to former husband). The mothers tended to be open and revealing of how they were personally affected during their adaptation to remarried family life. Some of the mothers indicated on their forms that they enjoyed the opportunity of reporting their problems, which would indicate that they found the exercise useful and that they likely put a good deal of thoughtful energy into it.

Many of the problems reported by the mothers are also problems which occur in many families, independent of family form. Problems related to #10, money matters, #11, leisure activities, #12, levels of aggression, #13, disciplining, #14 noise level, #15, foods, #17, discussing children, #18, private time, #19, children's misbehaviour, #20, time alone with partner, #21, time with children, and #29, expectations regarding domestic and child rearing responsibilities are common problems experienced in many families across the spectrum (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). Clients seen at The Family Centre present with such problems, to varying degrees, regardless of their family structure. Although these problems may not be unique to mothers in remarried families, they may be exacerbated by remarried family circumstances and by patterns of functioning which predated the remarriage.

Differences, between remarried partners, regarding issues around foods and cooking, leisure activities, division of responsibilities, and household tasks may be more intense than in first married families due to the history or "baggage" that each person brings into the relationship. Usually the mother is older than women in first marriages, and has lived on her own prior to the remarriage. Many of the mothers' lifestyle patterns would be well established by the time of a second marriage. Differences may therefore be amplified and compromise challenging. Problem #4, "We were all different and disconnected" is a general problem which captures this issue.

Difficulties and differences regarding disciplining and parenting (#13), and acceptable levels for children's aggression (#12) may also be more intense for mothers in remarried families than for first marriage mothers. Partners in remarried families have not had the opportunity to carve out or compromise for a lifestyle together without children, nor to adjust to the birth of children, or the developmental stages of shared children, with the inherent joys and challenges of rearing children, through the phases of childhood.

Problems with finances, #10, although experienced by many first married and single parent families, appears to be a more complex issue in remarried families. Stuart and Jacobson (1985) noted that mothers who enter second marriages are more aware that their partnership is as much an economic union as a romantic bond. A problem with finances was listed as the problem of first importance by women in remarried families

in Albrecht's (1979) study. Hobart (1991) suggested that money issues are often critical in remarried families because the husband may be making support payments to his former wife, which can contribute to stress for his new wife, and also due to the potential for spousal conflict regarding spending on his, hers, or their children, and on the couple themselves.

Noise level in the home, #14, may also be identified by many mothers regardless of family form, particularly at the time that their children enter adolescence, however, the arrival of the husband's biological children on weekends (a common scenario) may substantially increase the noise and commotion in the household. Perhaps, due to its specificity, the writer has not found this particular problem identified in any of the existing literature or research.

Thirty-eight percent (11 out of 29) of the problems identified by mothers are problems unique to living in a remarried family, i.e., the problems occur in relation to the family form. Problems #2, children fitting in which husband's family, #3, stepsibling sexual abuse, #5, ties with previous family, #6, husband not the father, #7, arguments between stepchildren, #22, thinking that his parents did not like me, #23, children "hating" stepfather, #24, connection to previous husband, #27, attraction between stepchildren, and #28, interfering ex-wife, are all problems identified by mothers specifically in remarried families. These problems are consistent with the problems discussed in the literature. Most of them are subsumed under problem #16, (there were

no models for what our family "should" be like) which has been discussed at length by Cherlin (1980) and Furstenberg and Spanier (1987).The lack of societal guidelines for mothers leaves them "sailing in unchartered seas" and, in a sense, developing social norms as they attempt to cope with these difficulties.

Many of the mothers' problems reflected an affective reaction (e.g., #2, anxiety, #7, mistrust, #21, betrayal, #23, wish for family harmony). Each of these problems pertains to concerns about the mothers' children, which suggests that the mothers reacted with emotion when difficulties involved their children. Such affective problems are associated with the wish for resolution of ambiguity or uncertainty and also reflect the burden of living in a family form without societal prescriptions for resolution.

Two of the problems, i.e., #3, my stepson sexually abused by daughter, and #26, my husband sexually abused my daughter, were identified by only the client group of participants. These problems were identified by only two "client" mothers. Since sexual abuse is illegal, often damaging psychologically, stressful for families, and a symptom of dysfunctional family dynamics (Sager, et al. 1983), it is not surprising that incestuous remarried families would be engaged in therapy.

Sexual abuse occurs in families independent of family form, socioeconomic status, educational level or age of children (Sager, et.al., 1983); however, in remarried families there is a loosening of sexual boundaries related to the structural nature of step relations which are not biological or legal and which have typically not involved developmental

ties (Wald, 1981). Bonds and emotional attachments grow, in remarried families, over time due to social and spatial ties. Also, the sexual atmosphere in the home is heightened due to the new couple's romantic bonding period (Sager, et al., 1983). Problems #3, stepson sexually abused daughter, and, #26, husband sexually abused daughter, reflect the consequences of unhealthy family dynamics, in general, and reflect the risks of loosened sexual boundaries in remarried families.

Problem #27, attraction between stepchildren, also describes a difficulty, from the mother's perspective, associated with sexuality in the stepfamily. The incest taboo may have less impact in remarried families since stepsiblings are not biologically related. A mother's discomfort with stepsibling attractions, and concern that attraction may precipitate sexual relations, is understandable in itself, and also, in terms of its effect on her relationships with her children, her stepchildren, her husband, and her former husband.

Overall, the mothers generated a wide cross section of problems, some general, some specific, some defined in terms of affect, some which exist due to the inherent structure of a remarried family and some which are experienced by families across the spectrum. Some of the problems (e.g., #8, arguments between children, #14, noise level, and #18, need for private time) are problems which can be solved through making change. Others (e.g., #6, not a family in which husband is the father, #16, no remarried family model) are predicaments which can not be changed, which need to be accepted,

and which a mother must learn to live with.

Since the mothers in this study had lived in their families between two and nine years, and the families are still intact today, it is reasonable to assume that many difficulties whether changeable problems or unchangeable predicaments have been resolved or accepted. Several mothers, in fact, indicated on the bottom of their forms, that the rewards of working through the problems was well worth the price.

Description of the Stepfathers' Problems

The stepfathers identified 24 problems. All stepfathers participated from the 20 remarried families. The stepfathers' list was complete after the problems identified by the first six stepfathers were entered. The list of stepfathers' problems is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Stepfathers' List of Problems

1. Feeling like an intruder or outsider in the family.
2. Knowing that I have no legal status with my stepchildren if my wife were to die.
3. Feeling "caught in the middle" between my wife and her children.
4. Trying to schedule our lives around custody visits.
5. Having to live with a limited parental role.
6. Not enough time alone with my wife.

7. Scheduling the comings and goings of all the children.
8. Inlaws interfering.
9. Experiencing the division of my wife's loyalties.
10. Anger at stepchildren because of their rudeness and lack of respect for me.
11. Anger at my wife for "taking sides" with her children rather than me.
12. Differences in life style.
13. Conflicts between my wife and my children.
14. Different interests than my wife.
15. My son sexually abused my stepdaughter.
16. Differences in discipline and parenting style.
17. More interest in my new family than my first one.
18. Different ideas about money, budgets, spending.
19. Spend much less time with my own children.
20. Different expectations for chores around the house.
21. Guilt for choosing a wife younger than my first wife.
22. Deciding who the children would spend holidays with.
23. Feeling disloyal to my own children if I were to be close to my wife's children.
24. Stress of supporting two families.

Discussion of the Stepfathers' Problems

All of the stepfathers' problems were identified after the sixth form was reviewed, indicating that stepfathers' problems in remarried families are high in commonality. The one exception was the family in which the mother was diagnosed with cancer shortly following the marriage. The illness-related problems reported by the stepfather (e.g., taking on the majority of parenting and domestic chores while my wife recovers from chemotherapy treatments) were not included.

Many of the stepfathers' problems are concerned with the ambiguity of a stepfather's role and status in relation to other family members, e.g., #1, outsider, #2, no legal status to wife's children, #4, scheduling life around custody visits, #5, limited parental role, #19, less time with biological children.

Men who are both fathers of non-custodial children and stepfathers of their wives' custodial children "are involved in the most complex stepfamily structure of all" (Visher & Visher, 1979, p.88). The roles of these stepfathers are particularly ambiguous and ill-defined. Because there is a natural father somewhere else, the stepfather is left with only partial financial, educational, and socialization functions for his stepchildren. Establishing his place in a family which has existed previously in a single-parent structure is no small task. The stepfathers' problems reflect the difficulties involved in joining a family in which the members share a common history which predates him as an outsider.

Several problems reveal the stepfathers' concerns with scheduling issues, e.g., #4, scheduling lives around custody visits, #7, scheduling the comings and goings of the children, #22, scheduling holidays. This concern with schedules suggests that working out schedules by being involved in decision-making was a practical means towards establishing oneself in the family, i.e., moving from a peripheral role to a more instrumental role in the family.

The stepfathers' problems are primarily cognitive, rational and focused on logistics and practical matters. In addition to schedules, problems identifying time management difficulties (#6), interference by inlaws (#8), and differences between husband and wife in areas such as lifestyle (#12), interests (#14), parenting (#16), money (#18), and expectations for chores (#20) reflect both the impact of spousal differences and the stepfathers' difficulties in sorting out their contribution to family functioning during the period of adjustment.

Money was discussed at length as one of the mothers' problems. The literature (e.g., Visher & Visher, 1990, Stuart & Jacobson, 1985) indicates that the nature of money problems is often somewhat different for the husband than for the wife. Money is often a focus of serious difficulty between the stepfather and his ex-wife and often makes for "unfinished business" from the previous marriage. The stepfathers in this study identified two money-related problems, i.e., #18, different ideas about money and spending, and #24, stress of supporting two families.

Problem #8, inlaws interfering, was identified by stepfathers and not mothers. The mothers' problems reflected more of a concern with how or whether they and their children fit in with their "new" inlaws, whereas, the men identified inlaw interference as problematic. Hobart (1991) suggested that when prior marriage children link remarried parents with their former spouses' families, relationships become very complex and stressful. Such stresses may create problems and conflict between remarried spouses.

Four of the stepfathers' problems involved affect (i.e., #10 and 11, anger, #21, guilt, #23, feeling disloyal). The identification of anger, guilt and disloyalty is consistent with reports in the clinical literature (e.g., Hetherington & Camara, 1984; Visher & Visher, 1991, 1982, 1987, 1979; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). The problem involving guilt identified by the stepfathers in this study, #21, guilt for choosing a wife younger than my first wife, also reflects a phenomenon in keeping with the statistics. Men in second marriages marry women an average of six years younger than themselves and three years younger than their first wives (Spanier & Glick, 1980). Why would men feel guilty? Perhaps, they were concerned about the effects of choosing a younger wife on their former wife and/or children. Perhaps a younger wife reveals an avoidance or resolution of mid-life crisis. Further investigations which explore, in more depth, the perceived reason for problems such as this would be a valuable contribution to the area.

"Feeling disloyal to my own children if I were to be close to my wife's children" (#23) is a very common problem for stepfathers (Visher & Visher, 1979; McGoldrick

& Carter, 1988). Such feelings of disloyalty are certainly understandable and likely contribute to much anguish for men as they attempt to "join" a new family and develop bonds and ties with stepchildren without betraying their own natural children.

Although some of the stepfathers' problems are problems which might have been identified in any family, regardless of family form, the majority of those identified are related directly to remarriage issues and occur due to the inherent structure of a remarried family. As was observed for the mothers, the problems not specific to remarried family life are problems which were likely more intense due to the absence of a shared history and the lack of societal norms for remarried families, e.g., #12, differences in life style, #14, different interests, #20 different expectations for chores.

Sixty-seven per cent (16 out of 24) of the stepfathers' problems were unique to the remarried family situation. Only 38% of the mothers' problems were unique. The men may have interpreted the task more literally and been more inclined to include only unique problems. Perhaps the women allowed for wider parameters and included all problems which they experienced as they learned to live in the new family. Alternatively, the stepfathers may not have experienced the kinds of problems which occur in other family forms, such as "finding private time" or "increased noise level."

One unique problem, i.e., #15, my son sexually abused my stepdaughter was identified by only one father. Although it may be questionable as to whether stepsibling sexual relations constitute incest, the loosening of sexual boundaries in remarried families

with adolescents is well-documented (Sager, et.al., 1983; Hetherington & Camara, 1984). Any forced or unwanted sexual activity would be considered abusive. Certainly, sexual abuse perpetrated by a man's son against his adolescent stepdaughter would, independent of the problems for the stepsiblings, create stress, tensions, and likely alienation of the stepfather at a time when the family was attempting to build cohesion and identity.

One of the mothers identified the problem, sexual abuse perpetrated by her husband against her daughter. Although problem forms were returned by every stepfather of the 20 participating families, no stepfather identified the same problem. As it is unlikely that sexual abuse of a stepdaughter would not be problematic for a stepfather, it is likely that the problem was unidentified due to desire for privacy or to shame.

Similarities and differences were noted between the mothers' and stepfathers' problems. Both groups identified problems related to differing values and lifestyles between husband and wife. Both included problems generalizable to any family form and problems unique to remarried families due to the remarried family structure. The majority of the stepfathers' problems were unique to remarried families, whereas, the majority of the mothers' problems were common to all families across the spectrum. Both men and women cited problems related to difficulties with children, however, the men focused more on issues which reflected their lack of involvement with children other than scheduling activities and custody visits. The mothers' problems with children

focused more on their involvement with children. Both groups identified some affective problems, but overall, the stepfathers tended to report more practical, cognitive, and logistical problems than the mothers whose problems were more emotionally-based.

Adolescents' Problems

The majority of the research and literature discuss childrens' problems from the viewpoint of parents, stepparents or teachers rather than from the child's perspective (e.g., Schwebel, Fine & Renner, 1991; Pill, 1990; Santrock et. al., 1982). To understand the implications of remarriage for children, it is important to consider their points of view. The few studies (e.g., Amato, 1987) which address children's problems from their points of view neither separate out the adolescent group from children in general nor review differences between adolescent males and females. The few studies which discussed gender differences (e.g., Bray, 1988; Clingempeel et. al., 1984b; Duberman, 1975) did not differentiate adolescents from younger children. The identification of problems experienced by male and female adolescents in this study is an attempt, in a small way, to contribute to an understanding of the nature, similarities and differences of difficulties reported by adolescent girls and boys.

Description of the Adolescent Males' Problems

The adolescent males identified a total of 18 problems. Of the four groups, the boys

reported the fewest number of problems. All problems (other than those reported by the family in which the mother had cancer) were identified after the eighth list was included. The problems are displayed in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Adolescent Boy's List of Problems

1. My stepdad seemed like an "intruder" in our family.
2. Torn between two halves of my family (my mom and stepdad\my dad and stepmom).
3. Transferred back and forth in joint custody situation.
4. Felt as though my mother was being taken away from me.
5. Different discipline styles of my mom and stepdad.
6. Animosity between the two families (my mom and stepdad and my dad and stepmom).
7. Felt disloyal to my dad if I got close to my stepdad.
8. My stepdad ignored us; he hardly did anything with us.
9. Mom gave too much attention to his kids when they were over, and not enough to me.
10. The change and commotion when his kids were at our house.
11. He's very different from my dad.
12. I was attracted to my stepsister; it was really tense.

13. I didn't like my new stepdad and didn't want him around.
14. My stepdad hits me.
15. My stepdad takes control and tells my mom what to do.
16. My stepdad yells at us.
17. My stepfather is too strict.
18. Competition between his son and me.

Discussion of the Adolescent Males' Problems

Once again, redundancy was reached quickly which suggests that the boys' problems are also high in commonality. The majority of the boys' problems were interactional in nature. The boy's primary emphasis was relationship issues between themselves and their stepfathers. Their secondary focus was relationship with steprelations and natural fathers.

Problems #1, stepdad seemed like an intruder, #8, stepdad ignored children, #11, stepdad different than dad, #13, didn't like stepdad, #14, stepdad hits me, #15, stepdad takes control, #16, stepdad yells, and, #17, stepdad too strict, all identified issues with the stepfather. Forty-four percent of the problems were directly related to difficulties with stepfathers.

Several factors can account for the preoccupation with stepfather problems. Adolescent boys are concerned with identification with their fathers, and often experience confusion with stepfathers who are unlike their natural fathers (Visher & Visher, 1990,

1979). The remarriage often functions to obliterate any fantasies of the natural parents' reuniting which can precipitate resentment and resistance to accepting the stepfather as a member of the household or as a role model (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Children often hold unreasonable expectations for remarried family life. When the reality of adaptation difficulties emerge, the stepfather may become the scapegoat (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). Also, boys tend to displace their anger at their mothers, for betraying their fathers, on to their stepfathers (e.g., Sager et. al., 1983) which complicates the formation of a positive stepfather\stepson relationship.

The adolescent males noted two interactional problems in relation to their mothers (#4, mother taken away from him, #9, giving attention to stepdad's children). Both of these issues reflect common concerns about abandonment, jealousy, and rivalry for the attention of their mothers (Amato, 1987; Crosbie-Burnett, 1984). The literature suggests that even though adolescents are concerned with developing an independent life separate from their families, they need to be included in family affairs (e.g., Visher & Visher, 1990; Hetherington & Camara, 1984). Since most children live with their mothers following a divorce, boys and mothers are often bonded closely. A stepfather may be resented for displacing the boy, particularly if the child was parentified by the mother.

The boys also included concerns about being a member of two households, e.g., #2, torn between two halves of my family, #3, transferred back and forth between mother's and father's homes, and #6, animosity between two families. Adolescents are able to

recognize the differences between homes and are sufficiently intellectually developed to observe what is happening around them. Coming to terms with the differences is an important aspect of adaptation.

Adolescence is the time of emerging sexuality. Sexual feelings towards stepsiblings and stepparents occur almost routinely in stepfamilies (Visher & Visher, 1979). Problem #12, attraction to stepsister, is common and normal when unrelated teenagers are expected to develop relationships. Certainly attraction does not lead inexorably to sexual abuse. The overt identification and normalization of sexual attraction is important and often reassuring to teenagers who may be fearful of their sexual awareness.

Competition between a stepfather's son and stepson was also noted (#18). This is an important problem which the writer has found to receive little discussion in the literature. Although it has been referred to as a component of forming extended family relations (Sager et. al., 1983), the specificity of problem #18 is unique. Certainly, when stepsibling males are about the same age, competition would be understandable during adaptation.

Overall, the boys' problems tended to be more interactional than personal and specific. The emphasis was on stepfather\stepson relations and other steprelations. Every problem was unique to the inherent structure of a remarried family. The challenge for adolescent males appears to focus primarily on adapting to life with a stepfather and stepsiblings, maintaining bonds with mother, and accepting differences between two

households.

Description of Adolescent Females' Problems

The teenage girls generated a total of 23 problems. All problems were identified following the fifth's girls form, save, once again, for the family with cancer. The cancer-related problems were not included on the master list. The problems are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Adolescent Girl's List of Problems

1. My stepsister and I were in constant competition to determine "who was better."
2. My mom didn't like my flirting with my stepdad.
3. Having my stepfather's kids around the house.
4. Feeling like I "didn't belong" in the new family.
5. Mom and I aren't as close as we used to be.
6. Not knowing how I really fit in with the family.
7. Skipping school.
8. I didn't like my stepdad and didn't want him around.
9. My school marks dropped.
10. I didn't know where I would be spending holidays.

11. My mom didn't spend as much time with me.
12. My stepbrother tried to have sex with me.
13. I wanted to live with my dad.
14. My stepfather hits me.
15. My mom didn't believe me that my stepbrother tried to touch me sexually.
16. My stepfather is too strict.
17. Different rules at mom and dad's houses.
18. My mom and stepdad kiss a lot.
19. My stepdad was sexually inappropriate.
20. I feel betrayed by mom because she sides with her husband, not with me.
21. I felt that my stepdad didn't like me.
22. Feeling crowded.
23. My "real" parents used me as "go between" (mediator).

Discussion of Adolescent Females' Problems

The girls' problems became redundant after five forms were reviewed. Like the three preceding groups, the adolescent females' problems were also high in commonality.

The girls reported five more problems than the boys in total. Bray's study (1988) found that, overall, girls in stepfamilies report more negative stress than boys. A greater number of problems would therefore be expected. Also to account for the higher number,

the girls identified more specific and personal problems than the boys. The kinds of problems reported by the adolescent males contrast, in many respects, the problems identified by the females.

The girls identified several problems related to their relationships with their mothers. Six of the girls' problems, compared to two of the boys, reflected difficulties with mothers. Since the research and literature which discuss familial relationships in remarried families focus more on stepparent\stepchild relations and noncustodial parent\child relations than on natural parent\child relations (e.g., Brand et. al., 1988; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Zill, 1988), the girls' reports of mother-related problems appear to be significant.

The problems identified by the girls included #2, mom didn't like daughter flirting, #5, not as close to mom, #11, mom didn't spend as much time with daughter, #15, mom didn't believe daughter, #18, mom kisses stepdad a lot, and #20, felt betrayed by mom. Since daughters identify with mothers as role models and often develop close relationships with their mothers following a divorce (e.g., Visher & Visher, 1979, 1990), it is understandable that they would experience difficulties sharing her attentions and affections with a stepfather. A girl's sense of betrayal by a mother who "sides with her husband" rather than with the daughter or who did not believe that her daughter had been sexually abused by a stepbrother could certainly exacerbate resentment.

The girls also reported a greater number of problems (five) associated with sexuality

than the boys (one). Although it is possible that the boys did not experience sexual issues as "problems" as much as the girls did, it is also possible that the girls were more open and forthright. Three of the sexual problems involved alleged sexual violations against the girls (#12, stepbrother tried to have sex with me, #15, stepbrother tried to touch me sexually, #19, stepfather was sexually inappropriate). Although sexuality and the loosening of sexual boundaries is discussed in a general sense (e.g., Sager et. al., 1983; Visher & Visher, 1979, 1990), overall, little is written specifically about stepsibling sexuality in the remarried family literature. The lack of prescriptions for life and relationships in remarried families (Cherlin, 1981) has serious repercussions regarding sexuality when biologically unrelated people live together in a family.

Many of the adolescent females' problems are emotionally laden and personal, e.g., #4, feeling of not belonging, #6, not knowing how I fit in, #8, didn't like stepdad, #13, wanted to live with dad, #20, betrayal, #feeling crowded. The girls certainly demonstrated the notion that females tend to relate to and express problems more affectively than boys.

The girls included two school-related problems, #7, skipping school, and #9, school marks dropped. The boys included no school problems. Once again, the boys may not have perceived difficulties in school as problems or as issues related to adapting to remarried family life. The girls did, which suggests that they felt that school performance and attendance was associated with their adaptation process, most likely as consequences

of the stresses and tensions they experienced at home.

Overall, the girls, as compared to the boys, identified more problems which could have been identified by adolescents living in any family form (i.e., #5, not as close to mom, #7, skipping school, #9, school marks dropped, #11, not as much time with mom, #20, mom sides with husband). Every one of the boys' problems was unique to remarried family life. Seventy-eight percent (18 out of 23) of the girls' problems were unique to a remarried family. The girls, like the mothers, may have applied wider parameters for problem inclusion when they interpreted the task.

The girls identified fewer "stepfather" problems (#8, didn't like stepdad, #14, stepdad hits me, #16, stepfather too strict, #19, stepdad sexually inappropriate, #21, stepdad didn't like me) than the boys (22% as opposed to 44%). The girl's emphasis on relationship problems centered on their mothers, whereas, the boy's focus was on stepfathers and biological fathers. A girl's sense of "losing" her mother, her role model and source of identification, would understandably dominate her experience. The primary challenges for the girls appear to have been to adapt to a changed relationship with their mothers and to resolve sexuality issues. The boys' main tasks were to establish a new relationship with a stepfather while adjusting to the effect of such a new relationship on their interaction with and feelings for their natural fathers and to adjust to differences between their mother's and father's households.

A minority of problems were shared by both the adolescent males and the females,

i.e., stepdad hits me, stepdad too strict, competition with stepsibling of same gender, and stepsiblings visiting. Although these specific problems viz a viz steprelations were common to both the boys and girls, the majority of their difficulties were not in common. This finding suggests that adolescent males and females experience the adaptation to life in a remarried family quite differently.

Part Two

Trochim's (1989) Concept Mapping software program was used to analyze the 100 theme sorts undertaken by the 25 family therapists and to produce concept maps of the problems for the mothers, stepfathers, adolescent males and adolescent females. Each problem in each of the four groups was typed into the computer program as well as the number assigned to each problem by each therapist. Concept maps were then generated to provide a visual, pictorial representation of the statistical analysis of the theme sorts. Problems which are closer together on the maps are those that were sorted more frequently into the same theme groups by the family therapists and are therefore more similar conceptually. The software produced boundaries around items that clustered together into more general concepts (Trochim, 1989). Problems which are situated closer together inside a cluster are more similar conceptually. Smaller, denser clusters are therefore more homogeneous in meaning. Clusters which are closer spatially to other

clusters are also closer conceptually.

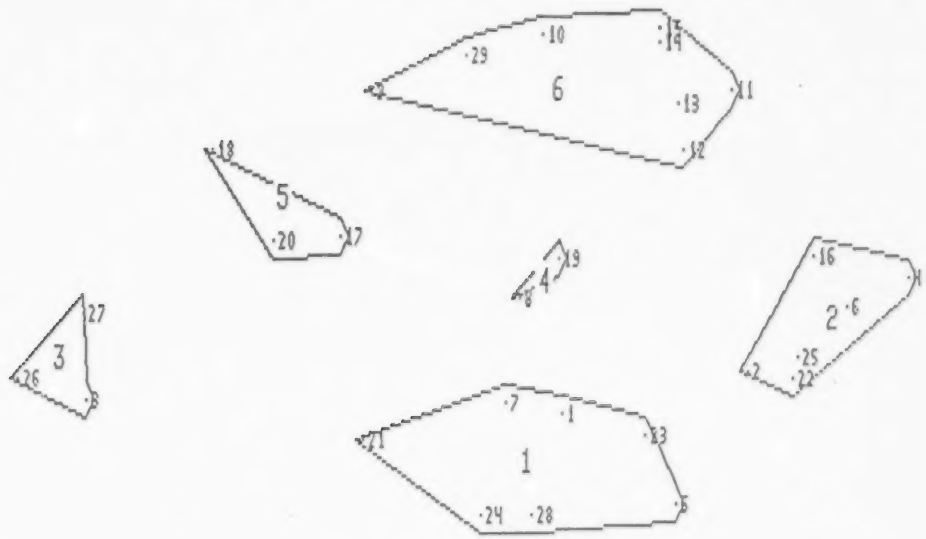
Each cluster was named to reflect the theme which underlies the problems in that cluster. The writer subjectively determined a semantic label to describe the concept represented by each cluster group. Some problems in each group are conceptually more similar than others. These items are plotted closer together in the cluster. Trochim (1989b) advises that these, more homogeneous statements, provide the best clue about the general concept or theme. Although an attempt was made to choose a title broad enough to include all problems in the cluster, the more homogeneous items were used as a basis for title selection.

The following is a commentary on the maps and cluster lists. As was previously noted, the objective of this study is to identify and discuss the problems, and their underlying themes. The prevalence or frequency of the problems contained in each cluster has not been addressed.

Concept Map of The Mothers' Problems

The concept map (Figure 1) which represents the mothers' problems is displayed followed by a "Cluster List" (Table 5) or listing of the statements in each cluster.

Figure A Concept Map of Mothers' Problems



Cluster 1: Relationships
Cluster 2: Belonging and Fitting In
Cluster 3: Sexuality
Cluster 4: Children's Behavior
Cluster 5: Time Management
Cluster 6: Household Management

Table 5

Mothers' Problems Grouped By Cluster

Cluster 1

Name: Relationships

1. Feeling "caught in the middle" between my children and my husband.
5. I had ties with my previous family which had no meaning for my husband.
7. I mistrusted that my husband really "loved" my children and truly had their best interest at heart.
21. Sense of betraying my children by spending less time with them and more time with my husband.
23. My children "hated" their stepfather and I found it very stressful because I wanted us all to get along.
24. Still connected to my children's father.
28. His ex-wife interfered with our family.

Cluster 2

Name: Belonging and Fitting In

2. I was anxious about my children fitting in with his family.
4. We were all different and disconnected.
6. We were not a "family" in which my husband was the father.
16. There were no models for what our family "should" be like.
22. Thinking that his parents and family did not like me.
25. I felt like an outsider in his family.

Cluster 3

Name: Sexuality

3. My stepson sexually abused my daughter.
26. My husband sexually abused my daughter.
27. Attraction between stepchildren of opposite genders.

Cluster 4

Name: Children's Behaviour

8. Arguments between my and his children.
19. My children misbehaving more often.

Cluster 5

Name: Time Management

17. Spending couple-time discussing chilren, not us.
18. Finding private time for myself.
20. Finding time to spend together with my husband

Cluster 6

Name: Household Management

9. I had more responsibility.
10. Money matters (budgeting, spending, saving, etc.)
11. Different ideas about leisure activities.
12. My husband and I differed regarding acceptable aggression levels for the children.
13. Methods and styles of discipling and parenting.
14. Noise level in the home.
29. My husband expected me to do the majority of the domestic and child-rearing tasks.

The clusters which are closer in proximity to other clusters, are closer conceptually, just as the items which are closer spatially inside a cluster are more similar conceptually than items further a part from one another. A "tour across the map" reveals that Cluster # 1, "Relationships," is closer spatially and conceptually to Cluster #2, "Belonging and

Fitting In," Cluster #4, "Children's Behavior," and Cluster #5, Time Management. Cluster #1 is farther away and more different conceptually from Cluster #6, Household Management and Cluster #3, Sexuality.

The relationships which the mothers referred to in cluster #1 involved feelings and behaviors related to interactions with children, husband and extended family members (ex-husband, ex-wife). For the mothers, the quality of relationships both within the remarried family and with ex-spouses is related to their own sense of fitting in and belonging to the remarried family, the behavior of their children and stepchildren, and time management.

Cluster #6, Household Management, which included problems related to different expectations between mothers and new husbands regarding money, leisure, acceptable levels of aggression, disciplining, and domestic responsibilities, is also closest spatially and conceptually to clusters 2 (fitting in), 5 (time management), and 4 (children's behavior).

Clusters #4 and #5 have a central position on the map which suggests that time management and children's behaviours are pivotal themes around which other themes revolve.

Cluster #3, "Sexuality" is a more isolated cluster. Two of the problems identify sexual abuse (#3 and #26). Each of these items was identified by a different mother. Both mothers from were "client" families, i.e., each mother and her respective family was in

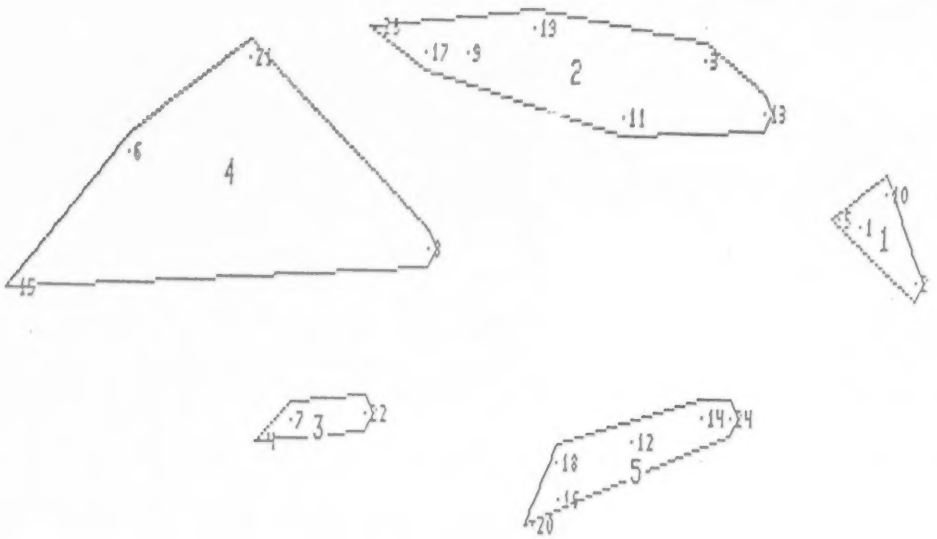
therapy at The Family Centre. The third problem in this cluster, #27, attraction between stepchildren, was identified by many of the mothers, independent of whether they were in therapy. Attraction is a normal and commom phenomenon which occurs in many remarried families. Sexual abuse is a deviant behavior, which, unfortunately, occurs too often.

Overall, the themes which underlie the problems reported by the mothers are some of the themes seen in the literature and research (e.g., Visher & Visher, 1990; Hetherington & Camara, 1984; Sagar et. al., 1983; Santrock et. al., 1982) which discuss, in a general sense, the difficulties faced by remarried family members. Some of the clinical literature (e.g., Visher & Visher, 1979) discusses the different kinds of difficulties faced by women and men in remarried families, but does not compare the similarities and differences. The value of delineating which of the many themes reveal, specifically, the mothers' problems allows for a basis of comparison with the themes that underlie the problems identified by the stepfathers.

Concept Map of The Stepfathers' Problems

Figure 2 (see below) displays the concept map of the stepfathers' problems. The map is followed by a "Cluster List" (Table 6) which lists the problems in each cluster group. The researcher created a name for each cluster, using the same process that was used for the mothers' problem clusters.

Figure B Concept Map of Stepfathers' Problems



Cluster 1: Role Definition
Cluster 2: Divided Loyalties
Cluster 3: Scheduling
Cluster 4: Lamentations
Cluster 5: Couple Relations Re: Practical Matters

Table 6

Stepfathers' Problems Grouped by Cluster

Cluster 1

Name: Role Definition

1. Feeling like an intruder or outsider in the family.
2. Knowing that I have no legal status with my stepchildren if my wife were to die.
5. Having to live with a limited parental role.
10. Anger at stepchildren because of their rudeness and lack of respect for me.

Cluster 2

Name: Divided Loyalties

3. Feeling "caught in the middle" between my wife and her children.
9. Experiencing the division of my wife's loyalties.
11. Anger at my wife for "taking sides" with her children rather than me.
13. Conflicts between my wife and my children.
17. More interest in my new family than my first one.
19. Spend much less time with my own children.
23. Feeling disloyal to my own children if I were to be close to my wife's children.

Cluster 3

Name: Scheduling

4. Trying to schedule our lives around custody visits.
7. Scheduling the comings and goings of all the children.
22. Deciding who the children would spend holidays with.

Cluster 4

Name: Lamentations

6. Not enough time alone with my wife.
8. Inlaws interfering.
15. My son sexually abused my stepdaughter.
21. Guilt for choosing a wife younger than my first.

Cluster 5

Name: Couple Relations Re: Practical Matters

12. Differences in life style.
14. Different interests than my wife.
16. Differences in discipline and parenting style.
18. Different ideas about money, budgets, spending.
20. Different expectations for chores around the house.
24. Stress of supporting two families.

The themes which underlie the stepfathers' problems include role definition, divided loyalties, scheduling, lamentations, and couple relations re: practical matters.

Clusters #1, role definition, and #2, divided loyalties, are close to one another on the map. That they are conceptually similar is not suprising. These two themes may be construed to be quite interdependent. The role of a stepfather and "new" husband to members of an existing family unit, surely, becomes clearer as divided loyalties are resolved or accepted, and vice versa.

One stepfather's form illustrated the interconnectedness of the two themes. In addition to listing his problems on his form, he included a narrative of his adaptation

process.

He wrote that initially he felt that he had betrayed his two biological teenage daughters by moving to Alberta from another province to settle with his new wife. His two stepdaughters, he explained, "hated me and didn't want me around. They were rude and obnoxious. I felt like an intruder."

He described his new wife as an intelligent and understanding woman whom he perceived to be "caught between" her husband and her children. He experienced the division of his wife's loyalties between her children and himself similar to his own experience of divided loyalties between his natural and step children. He described himself as excluded and abused, also ineffectual as a stepparent because he and his wife agreed that she would parent and discipline her daughters. His efforts to befriend his stepdaughters were in vain. They did not accept him.

Fortunately, his story had a happy ending! He told his wife that he could no longer tolerate the abuse from the girls and that unless they were civil to him, he would leave the marriage. He wife apparently relayed this information to her daughters together with her wishes to remain his wife. His stepdaughters reacted well.

He added that when his own daughter stayed with him in his new remarried family over a summer holiday, his stepdaughters came to see how much their stepsister loved her father. "This seemed to give them permission to like me too." After three years of marriage, this family appeared to be functioning well; however the stepfather indicated

that it took two years of patience, tolerance and working through problems. The adaptation period of two years is consistent with literature (e.g., McGoldrick & Carter, 1988).

The four items in cluster 4 are spatially quite distant. Although the concepts are not closely related conceptually, the problems do reflect the underlying theme of lamentations associated with frustrations and sorrows. The lack of time to spend with a spouse, interference by inlaws, a son's sexual violation against a stepdaughter, and feelings of guilt for choosing a young wife are all mournful isses which suggest the need for healing or change.

Cluster 5 is a compact cluster. All of the problems grouped in it are conceptually very similar. They all describe practical issues related to differences between the man and his wife, or to stress. Differences in lifestyle, interests, and expectations dominate this cluster. This cluster is fairly close to Cluster #3, "Scheduling," which indicates that the two themes have bearing on one another. Men and women who remarry bring into the new family ways of doing things which are different because of their previous family patterns. Certainly, this is to be expected. The emphasis on and connection between scheduling and couple related practical issues suggests that the men experienced these areas as problematic and may have felt more responsible for finding pragmatic solutions.

A Comparison of the Mothers' and Stepfathers' Themes

The emphasis on mens' and womens' roles in the family and in society has shifted somewhat over the past two decades. Women's participation in the labour force increased dramatically (Teachman, Polonko & Scanzoni, 1987). Feminism has been an influencial movement and has impacted women's expectations for their husband's participation in domestic affairs and parenting (Dornbusch & Strober, 1988). The idea of the father, as "nurturant caretaker," emerged in the mid 1970s (Lamb, 1986). Men became more involved in the delivery of their children (Klaus & Kennell, 1982), and somewhat more involved in the parenting of their children (Pleck, 1983), at least until divorce, when the mother typically assumed the role of custodial and primary parent. Men and women have slowly, and to varying degrees, entered one another's spheres of activity.

Such a shift appears, however, to be more in rhetoric and emphasis than it is a complete or universal change in traditional sex-roles (Strober, 1988). The shift has been noted most commonly in the college-educated (Lamb, 1985). In the majority of families, however, mothers continue to provide the emotional support for the family, to spend the majority of time with the children, and to do the majority of the housework (Strober, 1988).

The problems identified by the mothers and stepfathers, who participated in this study, reflect the more conventional, gender specific themes traditionally associated with their sex-roles.

Mothers have traditionally "run the household," parented the children, and created the emotional climate for the family based on cohesiveness, stability, and interpersonal warmth (Visher & Visher, 1987). The mothers' themes (relationships, belonging and fitting in, sexuality, time management, children's behavior, and household management) reflect a continued emphasis in these areas. The stepfathers' emphases, as reflected by their themes, is quite different than the mothers'. Perhaps the men have different expectations placed on them than have women. The men's themes (role definition, divided loyalties, scheduling, lamentations, and couple relations re: practical matters) reveal the problems associated with more practical, functional, and logistical concerns. The stepfathers' themes are consistent with those which were noted by Visher and Visher in 1979, some fourteen years ago. The issues which have been associated with stepfathers have not changed significantly over the course of time. The "lamentations" theme is somewhat of an exception in that it does reveal expressions of regret and an awareness of problems which "cry out" for healing and/or resolution.

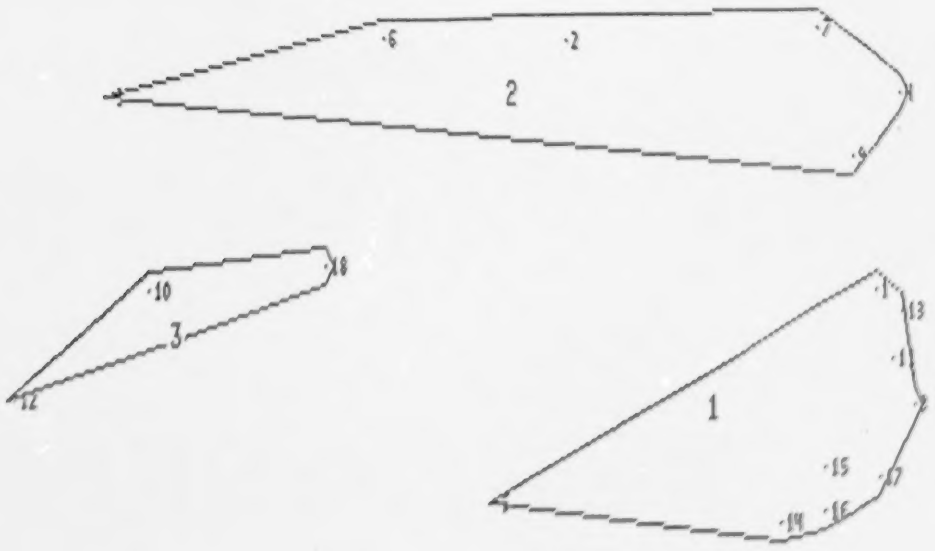
Bohannan and Erickson (1977) suggested that men feel more responsibility for family functioning in their remarried families than they do in first families. Perhaps Hobart's (1991) finding that men tend to "give in" to their wives more often in second than in first marriages, suggests that giving in is one way of facilitating acceptance by family members and enhancing family functioning. The fact that every one of the stepfathers, of the 20 families who participated in the study, returned his problem form

to the researcher indicates that the stepfathers are involved and concerned enough about their families to experience problems and to participate in a study investigating their problems. The mens' themes indicate that their problems revolved around their struggle to become actively involved members of their families. Perhaps stepfathers seeking to define their roles, resolve their divided loyalties, participate in their stepchildren schedules, express regrets, and address practical matters in the context of their marital relationships are seeking to be active and caring participants in their families.

Concept Map of The Adolescent Males' Problems

The boys' problems are represented on the concept map (Figure 3) below and in the cluster list (Table 7) in which their problems are grouped into the clusters displayed on the map. The researcher labelled each cluster.

Figure C Concept Map of Adolescent Males' Problems



Cluster 1: Stepfather Relations
Cluster 2: Loyalties
Cluster 3: Stepsibling Relations

Table 7

Adolescent Males' Problems Grouped By Cluster

Cluster 1

Name: Stepfather Relations

1. My stepdad seemed like an "intruder" in our family.
5. Different discipline styles of my mom and stepdad.
8. My stepdad ignored us; he hardly did anything with us.
11. He's very different from my dad.
13. I didn't like my new stepdad and didn't want him around.
14. My stepdad hits me.
15. My stepdad takes control and tells my mom what to do.
16. My stepdad yells at us.
17. My stepdad is too strict.

Cluster 2

Name: Loyalties

2. Torn between two halves of my family (my mom and stepdad\my dad and stepmom).
3. Transfered back and forth in joint custody situation.
4. Felt as though my mother was being taken away from me.
6. Animosity between the two families (my mom and stepdad and my dad and stepmom).
7. Felt disloyal to my dad if I got close to my stepdad.
9. Mom gave too much attention to his kids, when they were over, and not enough to me.

Cluster 3

Name: Stepsibling Relations

10. The change and commotion when his kids were at our house.
12. I was attracted to my stepsister; it was really tense.
18. Competition between his son and me.

The three clusters reveal that the themes underlying the boys' problems are stepfather relations, loyalties, and stepsibling relations. The boys' problems tended to be generalized, interactional and less personal than the other groups. These factors account for the lower number of problems overall, and the fewer theme clusters.

Cluster #1 is the most dense cluster. The majority of the problems are clustered under the theme "Stepfather Relations." All of the items, except problem #5, are positioned close together which indicates that the concepts in each of these problems are closely related to one another and that they were sorted together more frequently by the family therapists. All of these statements directly identify preceived problems with stepfathers.

Problem # 5 in Cluster #1 is somewhat different conceptually. It describes a problem with the stepdad's discipline style in relation to his mother's discipline style. The concept, as it relates to stepfather relations, is related, but somewhat different that the other eight problems in the cluster.

Stepfather relations is a significant problem theme for the adolescent males in this study. Fifty percent of their problems reflected the same underlying theme. The boy's

adaptation to living in their new families was associated primarily with learning to live with their stepfathers. Caring relationships take time to grow. Adolescents have more of a previous family history and are cognitively more mature than younger children. They are capable of observing and interpreting family dynamics. These variables often make the development of a new familial relationship more challenging (Visher & Visher, 1987).

Cluster #3, "Stepsibling Relations," also reflects problems associated with the development of new family relationships. Commotion, attraction and competition define the nature of the problems experienced in relation to stepsiblings.

Cluster #2, "Loyalties," is a large cluster in which the statements are not as closely related conceptually as the statements are in Clusters #1 and #3. Problems #4, #7, and #9 are closer in proximity and concept and were placed in the same theme sort more frequently than numbers #2, #3, and #9. "Loyalties" more accurately reflects problems #4, #7, and #9 than it does #2, #3 and #9; however, to varying degrees, all of the problems do identify issues related to loyalty.

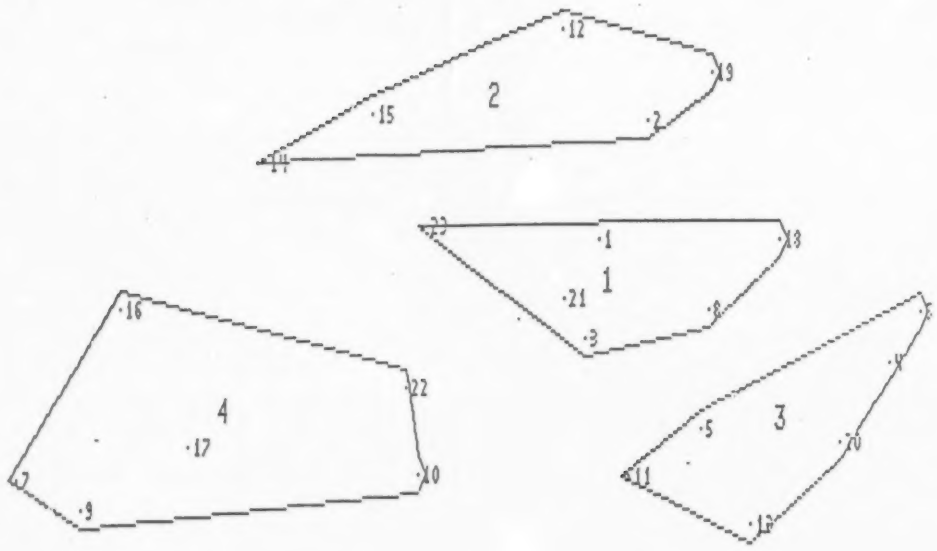
Loyalty issues are legendary for children in remarried families. The boy's identified many of the loyalty conflicts discussed in the literature (e.g., Visher & Visher, 1987, McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). This theme included loyalty concerns associated with the interactions between boy and mother; boy and father; boy and stepfather; boy, mother and stepsiblings; and boy and stepmother. The size of the cluster on the concept map

reflects the breadth of the theme.

Concept Map of the Adolescent Females' Problems

The concept map of the girls' problems is displayed in Figure 4 and the cluster groups are described in the Cluster List, Table 8.

Figure D Concept Map of Adolescent Females's Problems



Cluster 1: Rilvary
Cluster 2: Boundaries
Cluster 3: Alienation
Cluster 4: Stepfamily identity

Table 8

Adolescent Females' Problems Grouped by Cluster

Cluster 1

Name: Rivalry

1. My stepsister and I were in constant competition to determine "who was better."
3. Having my stepfather's kids around the house.
8. I didn't like my stepdad and didn't want him around.
18. My mom and stepdad kiss alot.
23. My "real" parents used me as "go between" (mediator).

Cluster 2

Name: Boundaries

2. My mom didn't like my flirting with my stepdad.
12. My stepbrother tried to have sex with me.
14. My stepfather hits me.
15. My mom didn't believe me that my stepbrother tried to touch me sexually.
19. My stepdad was sexually inappropriate.

Cluster 3

Name: Alienation

4. Feeling like I "didn't belong" in the new family.
5. Mom and I aren't as close as we used to be.
6. Not knowing how I really fit in with the family.
11. My mom didn't spend as much time with me.
13. I wanted to live with my dad.
20. I feel betrayed by mom because she sides with her husband, not with me.

Cluster 4

Name: Stepfamily Identity

7. Skipping school.
9. My school marks dropped.
10. I didn't know where I would be spending holidays.
16. My stepfather is too strict.
17. Different rules at mom and dad's houses.
22. Feeling crowded.

A tour across the girl's map indicates that three themes, #1, "Rilvary," #2, "Boundaries," and #3, "Alienation" are located within close proximity of each other in the eastern region. The themes are closely related. Trochim (1989) suggested that clusters can be considered to fall within regions when they occur close spatially in one area of the map and share common characteristics. He suggested that regions can then be named to describe the group of clusters.

The clusters in the eastern region could be subsumed under the higher order theme, "Reorganization." The girls' struggles with violated boundaries manifested in sexual and physical abuse, competitiveness, and feelings of alienation are themes which reflect a lack of stepfamily organization. Unclear rules for behavior and undefined roles for family members can easily precipitate sexual and physical violations against teenage girls and result in feelings of betrayal, confusion, isolation and uncertainty about how they fit in.

Adolescence is the developmental period for identify formation and individuation (Erikson, 1950). Confusion associated with undefined stepfamily identify may affect the

development of a teenage girl's personal identity. Visher & Visher (1987) noted that sometimes teenage girls get so caught up in the haze of trying to fit in and develop stepfamily relations that they fail to move away from the family toward their own independent emotional attachments. Acting out behaviors, insecurity, withdrawal and depression can ensue.

The problems in Cluster #4, located in the southwest quadrant of the map, are more separate from the problems in the other three clusters. All seem to be manifest difficulties around family identity in response to the shift from a single parent to a remarried family. Confusion about holidays, stepfather's discipline style, rules, and feeling crowded, relate directly to adjustment and the need to establish a new family identity. Skipping school and lowered school marks may be more a consequence of the lack of identity. Change is unsettling and stressful and school performance is often affected by significant changes and stresses in a family situation (Brand et. al., 1988).

A Comparison of Adolescent Males' and Adolescent Females' Themes

The themes underlying the problems reported by teenage males and females differ significantly. The males' themes, i.e., stepfather relations, loyalties, and stepsibling relations are much more interractional and less personal in emphasis than the girls' themes. The girls' themes which include rilvary, boundaries, alienation, and reogranization, reflect a more personal, affective, reaction to difficulties. The girls

expressed their problems more in terms of how they were affected by them. The effects involve feelings of alienation from the family and competition for affection, attention and to prove one's worth.

Although the adolescents who participated in this study may have done so less willingly than the adults, and perhaps under pressure from their parents, they did participate. They took the time and put forth the thought and reflection to identify and report their difficulties. Many of the teenagers included between eight and twelve problems.

Since adolescents typically resist the type of tasks required by this study, the researcher had some concerns about whether the adolescents would engage, in a meaningful way, in the exercise. By and large, they did. Their participation would appear to indicate that not only did they face problems while learning to live in their new families, but also, they were able and willing to identify and express them at length. The adolescents' contributions were impressive, as were their mothers' and stepfathers'.

Chapter V

Final Discussion

The first goal of this research was to identify and compare the problems experienced by mothers, stepfathers, adolescent males and adolescent females as they learned to live in their remarried families. The second objective was to determine whether the problems reflected underlying themes. Thirdly, the study aimed to name, discuss and compare the themes which the problems reflected.

Mother, stepfathers, teenage boys and teenage girls from 20 remarried families in Edmonton, Alberta participated in the study by identifying the problems they encountered. Five of the families were in family therapy and fifteen were non-client families. The problems reported by each of the four groups were sorted into themes by 25 family therapists from The Family Centre, a large, accredited family counselling agency in Edmonton. The results of the 100 theme sorts were analyzed via Trochim's (1989) Concept Mapping program to find the higher order themes derived from the results of the therapists' sorts. Concept mapping was a useful method for generating themes, since it is a statistical methodology which does not rely on the researcher's subjective judgement. It therefore adds objectivity to the study of constructs as they are experienced by participants.

Summary of The Findings

The themes describe the general concepts which underlie the specfic problems reported by mothers, stepfather, adolescent males and adolescent females adapting to life in remarried families. The problems and themes were compared for similarities and differences between the mothers and stepfathers and the boys and girls.

The mothers reported 29 problems which reflected six themes, the highest number of problems and themes, overall. The stepfathers identified a total of 24 problems and five themes, the adolescent girls, 23 problems and four themes, and the boys, 18 problems and three themes. The problems in each group were identified after a maximum of eight problem forms were reviewed. The problems were therefore high in comonality in each of the four groups, i.e., the problems quickly became redundant.

The same sorts of concerns were identified by client and non-client families with the exception of the two problems indicating sexual abuse. Sexual abuse, i.e., violations perpetrated by a husband and a stepson against a daughter, was identified by two mothers from different families who were clients in therapy. Domestic violence was not reported by any member of any family, in therapy or not.

The differences in problems and themes between the mothers and stepfathers were readily apparent. The mothers reflected more personal, specific and emotion-based problems than the stepfathers. The mothers' themes (relationships, belonging, sexuality, time management and household management) mirrored their focus on issues related to

the emotional climate and domestic affairs of the household.

The men's problems tended to be more cognitive, based on practical matters, and concerned with establishing a place in the family. Their themes revealed the emphasis on defining their familial roles while working through issues around divided loyalties, lamentations, scheduling the children's activities, and marital relations. The children were a primary focus for both mothers and stepfathers however the mothers were more concerned about relationship dynamics with children while the men were more focused on the children's activities and schedules. Many of the "conventional" concerns of women and men in families, i.e., relationship and domestic orientation vs. practical and active orientation, appear to be relevant in 1993 in the remarried families in this study.

Only four of the problems identified by the boys and girls were the same, i.e., stepfather hits, stepfather too strict, stepsiblings visiting and competition with stepsiblings. The themes derived from the problems for each of these two groups reflect the differing accentuations. The boys themes included relations with stepfather, loyalty issues and stepsibling interactions. The concepts are interactional in nature and concerned with relations with stepfathers and stepsiblings. The girls' themes, rilvary, boundaries, alienation and stepfamily identity are more personal in flavour and reflect the tendancy to be more emotional and inward looking. Overall, the themes and problems identified by mothers, stepfathers, and adolescents in this study are consistent with and validate the problems described in the remarried family literature and research (e.g., Amato, 1987;

Bray, 1988; Ganong & Coleman, 1987; Hobart, 1991; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). The results of this study also brought to the fore some problems which have received little attention in the literature to date. The mothers identified the increased noise as problematic and the stepfathers included guilt for having chosen new wives younger than their former wives. The boys emphasized the problem of competition between themselves and a new stepbrother and the girls identified problems related to their relationships with their biological mothers. Further investigation of the prevalence and frequency of these specific problems would be enlightening.

Conclusions

The members of remarried families who participated in the study have been living in their new families from two to nine years. These are families which, intact today, reported that they did experience problems as they attempted to adapt to their new family situations. Not one family member returned a form indicating that he or she had not experienced any problems. Problems appear to be endemic for people adapting to remarried family life.

Although the majority of the identified problems were unique to remarried families due to their inherent structure, some of them, particularly those reported by mothers, were problems found in any family, independent of family form. Families, across the spectrum, experienced some problems in common, whereas, some problems are specific

to remarried families.

Concept mapping was a well-suited methodology to analyze the data. An objective analysis of the theme sorts undertaken by the family therapists generated the higher order themes which underlied the problems identified by remarried family members. Concept mapping allowed for objectivity not available in phenomenological investigations. Concept mapping seems to be a useful method for objectively clustering problems into underlying themes.

Limitations of The Study

This study included remarried families from Edmonton, Alberta only. Although the generalizability of the findings are restricted due to this limitation, the problems and themes reported by remarried family members in Edmonton are highly consistant with the findings in the extant literature. The results of this empirical study, in fact, serve to validate much of the information in the clinical literature based on clinicians' observations and reports.

This research deals with the problems faced by remarried family members and the themes which underlie those problems. It does not investigate the prevalence or frequency of the problems across a wide segment of the population. Neither does the study compare the problems and themes experienced by remarried families with themes experienced by families in general.

Implications For Further Research

The findings of this research have implications for future research. Additional studies are indicated to validate the results of this investigation and to explore their reliability with different groups of remarried families. A similar study to investigate the problems identified by members of remarried families in other cities is warranted.

It would be interesting to investigate the methods and strategies utilized by members of remarried families to work through, resolve or accept the problems they encountered as they were learning to live in their new families. It would also be of value to compare and contrast the problems in family life across family forms, i.e., first married, single parent and remarried families.

A follow up to this study which provided ratings by mothers, stepfathers, and adolescent boys and girls, of the degree to which they each experienced the identified problems would be enlightening. Further research which explores the differences and similarities between remarried families in and not in therapy would be interesting too.

A study which investigates the problems in different types of remarried family structures (e.g., stepmother families, families which include children of both spouses, families in which a previous spouse died) would also be valuable.

Questions generated by this research could be investigated:

a) How do stepfathers establish a place for themselves in a family unit which predated their involvement?

b) Why do adolescent males experience more interrelational problems than adolescent girls?

c) Are the conventional gender-related sex roles changing in remarried families?

d) What are the differences between husband's and wives' roles in remarried families vs. first married families?

e) How do family members establish and define healthy relationships in a remarried family?

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study support the discussions in the research and literature which suggest that people in stepfather families do encounter problems, which reflect underlying themes, during their adaptation processes.

This author suggests that family therapists need to ensure that they are informed of the nature of these problems in order to be of assistance to clients in remarried families. According to the statistics from The Family Centre, there has been a marked increase in the numbers of remarried families presenting for therapy at The Family Centre over the past fifteen years. Since the results of this research indicate that different kinds of problems are experienced by mothers, stepfather, adolescent boys, and adolescent girls in stepfather families, it would appear important that therapists are also mindful of addressing issues specific to individual members when working with these families.

Wald (1981) found that many remarried families seek therapy when stepchildren reach adolescence. Since adolescence can be a particularily tumultuous period of life and since working with adolescents can be challenging for therapists, findings, such as those in this study, which inform therapists and help them understand adolescent issues are considered to be helpful.

The results of this study also have relevance for family life educators and family development programs. Courses, workshops and seminars presented for members of remarried families and for the professionals who assist them are growing in numbers in response to demand. Education is an important aspect of prevention. When mothers, stepfathers, and teenagers become informed of the types of problems they might encounter, they are probably better equipped to cope with or work through them.

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APPENDIX A

Please Help

Dear Participant:

Re: Research Study

This study is an investigation of the problems experienced by adolescents and their mothers and stepfathers as they learned to live in their remarried or "new" families.

The results of this study will contribute to the planning of programs and to the practise of therapy which address the needs of remarried families.

I would greatly appreciate your contribution to this study. Kindly complete the enclosed forms and return them to me in the self-addressed, preposted envelope. This should take about 15 minutes.

Your participation is completely voluntary and totally anonymous. Although I would appreciate your help, you are under no obligation whatsoever to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any questions, please telephone me at 424-1807. Feel free to make any comments or explanations on the back of the forms. Returning the forms indicates your consent to participate. (Parents: returning the forms also gives your consent to have the adolescents in your family participate.)

Thank you very much for your cooperation. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Lynda J. Phillips, M.Ed.
Chartered Psychologist

APPENDIX B

Demographic Information

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Length of time you have lived in a remarried family:

_____

Ages of children in the remarried family:

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

Problems

Instructions: Please fill out this form individually so that you are not influenced by other family members. Identify as many problems as you experienced (need not be 15). If you need more space, please use the bottom of the page.

Insert your completed form in the envelope provided and return to the researcher.

I am presently living in a remarried family. Following the marriage, I experienced the following problems as I learned to live in the "new" family form:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____